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by

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# PROLOGUE

Two men toiled up the steep hill from Ketworth. The crest of the Downs loomed above them, and the rain dripped steadily from the trees, though the storm had abated. The dark mass of clouds was passing seaward.

The road was sodden and little more than a cart-track through the damp woods where the trees met overhead. Beyond, the road passed into the open country. The hump of the Downs hid the sea, while to the north the Sussex Weald was half shrouded in mist.

They paused at a little dilapidated gate fastened with rusty wire, and looked down at a forlorn cottage through a tangled, unweeded garden. The windows of the cottage were barred with wooden shutters—like blind eyes—and no smoke rose from the chimneys. The flagged path was overgrown with weeds, and sprouting grass protruded in tufts from between the stones.

In spite of himself Nevin shivered. " Have you brought me all this way to see a deserted cottage ? " he asked.

Sinclair turned to him with a sober face. " This is where Kitty Lake was murdered."

Nevin looked at his friend curiously. " I remember the case well, it made a great stir at the time."

Sinclair paused. " You mean you read what the papers had to say about it—the story as the public knew it."

His mouth was a straight hard line beneath his moustache.

" There is something more behind it, then? " asked Nevin.

There was a grim look about Sinclair's face. " It was my last case and the cause of my leaving the public service. It was also my greatest failure and my greatest success."

Nevin scented a story. " Tell me about it; as you have brought me all this way in the wet, I deserve some reward."

" Let's go inside first," said Sinclair, unwinding the wire which held the gate.

They walked down the path. In the spring weather the vegetation had pushed up, rank and thick, and in some places was already rotting. Faint traces of what had once been a rose-garden showed among the tangle. The door was of solid, unpolished oak, cracked in places. The walls were of ancient beams, with yellow plaster between, on which blotches of damp showed like a leprosy.

" Why has it stood empty all this time? " asked Nevin. " It is nearly a year since the murder took place, isn't it? "

" A year this June," said Sinclair. There was a queer note in his voice.

" Is it merely superstition? I mean, will no one take it? "

" No. Mr. Kenyon would never let or sell it, and he's never lived here since. I can quite understand."

" Robert Kenyon the playwright? I remember, he owned the cottage."

" He used it as a retreat to finish his plays, where he could have absolute quiet. It had been just an ordinary old country cottage, and he adapted it for his work—he lived very simply. But come, let's go inside."

Nevin looked at his companion questioningly. " Got a key? "

" No, but we can get in through the French windows at the back. I'll show you. Come round here."

He led the way to the corner of the cottage where once had been a path, but the herbage had crept up to the wall.

" Mind how you go," he said, and stooped to feel among the weeds. " Ah, here it is." He rose, and moved them gingerly with his foot, exposing a rusty lawn-mower lying on its side, its blades red as though with blood.

" How did you know it was there? " asked Nevin.

" I knew it was there," said Sinclair convincingly.

They passed to the back of the house, where a small patch of grass separated the cottage from the thick woods. Here a room of more recent date had been built out from the old cottage, a room with French windows, the blinds of which were drawn and the hasp badly rusted. Sinclair drew a thin-blade knife from his pocket and with difficulty forced the catch back with a jerk. He pulled the window open and stood back.

A rank, musty rush of air as from a vault greeted them.

"Phew!" said Nevin, starting back. "What a horrible smell!"

"Wait a minute—it will clear. I'll tell you about the murder," said Sinclair. "It was on June 10 last year. Mr. Kenyon had come down to the cottage with his wife and Captain Farrar, his private secretary. He'd finished the new play he'd been writing, and wanted absolute quiet in order to go over it. They asked Kitty Lake to come and stay with them. She was a great friend of Moira Kenyon, and had taken several minor parts in Kenyon's plays, and done very well, I believe. She was only twenty-two, and had real talent and plenty of good looks, besides a very charming manner, I am told, though I never saw her myself. She was also free from mannerisms, and Kenyon was going to give her the principal part in his new play. That was the position of affairs on the day of the murder."

Sinclair pushed the blind aside and entered. Nevin, with something like a shudder, followed him. It was rather a weird experience. The room was in darkness till Sinclair raised the blind. Even then the light was dim and the outlines of the room were indistinct. They could just make out a piano, a sofa, and a desk. A carpet of some dull red colour covered the floor. The music-stool was overturned. Sinclair produced a hand-lamp and flashed it on the floor, where a dull brownish stain of ill omen was still visible. Dust lay thick over everything, and the door hung limp from its hinges, and slowly moved to and fro with a moaning sound as the draught came in from the window.

"Let's get out of this. I've had enough," said Nevin.

"You must see the rest of the house. This room was Kenyon's study, where the murder took place."

Sinclair led the way through the open door into the room beyond, which had been the kitchen of the cottage in old days. The floor was of brick, and a huge old fireplace yawned empty and black, with settees of rough wood in the ingle-nooks. The walls were of plaster, and black oak beams crossed the ceiling. There was a table made from one slab of oak, and an old-fashioned sideboard whereon dull pewter vessels were displayed. A bookshelf filled with rotting mildewed books, a sofa and a few chairs, completed the furniture. In the corner a door led to the narrow stair which gave access to the bedrooms, while another door led to an outhouse which had been used as a kitchen. Here was an oil-stove, corroded and cobwebbed, while rusting pots and pans hung from the walls.

A sense of desolation pervaded the place, and the sound of their footsteps seemed to awaken uneasy ghosts.

"Have you seen enough?" asked Sinclair, in a voice scarcely above a whisper.

"More than enough," Nevin answered. "For heaven's sake let's come away."

He made his way through the rooms almost at a run, and paused in the wasted garden outside. "I say, whatever made you take me in there?" he asked, panting.

"You wished to hear the story, and I badly wanted to tell it you. I wanted a confidant."

A thin rain had begun, but Nevin was damp with

sweat. He led the way in silence up the steep path to the high road and out of the gate.

Sinclair waited to fasten the window, and then tied up the gate with wire and joined his friend. Darkness was coming on, and under the trees thick shadows wrapped them round.

The muddy road made walking difficult, but as Sinclair unfolded his story all thoughts of their surroundings dropped from Nevin's mind, and only the ugly, stark horror of the tale gripped him. Presently, over the crest of the hill the lights of Ketworth appeared across the valley. Sinclair stopped.

"There's an old inn here called 'The Half Moon.' Let's turn in there. We need something warming."

"Certainly," said Nevin, and then: "It's a nasty story, but I don't understand. Surely the murderer was caught and convicted?"

"You shall hear the end—no, not the end; the end has yet to come."

"You mean there may be what the papers call 'fresh developments'?" said Nevin, trying to laugh.

"It is in the hands of God," said Sinclair solemnly.

The red blinds of the inn shone cheerfully in the gloom, and Sinclair led the way into a bright, cheery room. The homely figure of the landlord as he bustled in to take their order brought Nevin's mind back to everyday life. Sitting before the blazing wood fire, with hot drinks set before them, it all seemed so different—the darkness and mystery from which they

had come ; the tenebrous woods—where branches stretched out to clutch them—and the dead, silent cottage away back in the hollow, holding its dread secret close. Here Sinclair finished his story.

# CHAPTER I

## THE MURDER

"This ought to make a wonderful scene," said Farrar, looking up from the manuscript he was reading, " but it is rather realistic, and I am not at all sure it won't be too horrible."

" Nonsense, my boy ! " said Kenyon. " The public like to be thrilled. It adds a zest to life, and gives them something to talk over in their dreary lives. We'll keep that part, whatever else we cut."

" Very well, sir," said Farrar, and went on reading aloud.

Kenyon paced the room restlessly, a copy of his play in one hand and a silk handkerchief in the other At each turn he paused at the door leading to his study—they were working in the living-room. Kitty Lake had gone to the study and was playing the piano—softly, in order not to disturb the men—and the sound came faintly through the closed door. Moira Kenyon was in the kitchen, busy with household duties.

Suddenly Kenyon's pause became a halt, and his body went rigid.

" About this next piece——" Farrar began.

" Wait ! What was that ? " Kenyon held up his hand with a sudden jerk.

The other looked up in surprise. The music had

stopped, but otherwise he had heard nothing to cause the tense attitude of the writer, and for a moment he thought he was referring to the play.

"My God, who is that?" said Kenyon in a strained voice.

Farrar rose and tiptoed to the door. A man's voice—purposely lowered—was heard in the room beyond, and then came a woman's sob, and words which sounded like someone pleading. The two men distinctly heard the girl say, "Oh, do go away. Only ruin can come of it." And then there was a sound of someone crying hopelessly.

Kenyon sprang to the door and tried the handle. "It's locked," he said in a whisper. "Go round to the window and see who this man can be in there with Kitty."

There was an intensity of passion and fear in his voice which would not stand delay. Farrar made a dart for the door leading to the garden and ran round the corner of the cottage, only to fall with a crash over a mowing-machine. The noise he made was sufficient to scare any intruder away, and he rose with a curse and rubbed his bruised shins. When he got round the corner, the French windows of the study were open and the room was empty. As he stood at the entrance, a furious banging came at the inner door, which gave way with a crash. Kenyon rushed into the room with his wife, who had been brought from the kitchen by the noise.

Kitty Lake was lying on the floor in a crumpled heap, and blood was trickling in an ominous line along the carpet.

They knelt beside the still form which had been

full of life a few minutes before, and a shudder of horror went through them.

A moment's glance showed that her throat had been cut with a savage gash, and death must have been instantaneous.

Kenyon rose to his feet with the face of a madman. "Out quick, and search before he gets away," he shouted, and turned to the window, followed by Farrar.

Moira Kenyon was left kneeling beside the poor girl, dumb with grief and horror.

The men ran down the hill and into the wood. The undergrowth was very thick, and they had some difficulty in forcing their way through. As they emerged on to a narrow path which crossed the wood, they saw a crouching figure in front of them, and with a bound Kenyon was on him and flung him to earth.

"Got you, you devil!" he shouted.

A choking sound came from the prostrate man, and Farrar pulled Kenyon roughly from him.

"Steady," he said. "Don't kill the man. Let's see who it is."

Kenyon yielded to the other's grip and rose from the ground.

"Get up," he said fiercely.

Breathing hard, the man rose and spluttered feebly, "What be the matter, zurs?" And, when he had got his breath, "I bain't doing no 'arm."

"John!" said Kenyon. "What are you doing here? Quick, now!"

"I be doin' nothin'," said the man in an injured

voice, rubbing his throat. " I be goin' round to see them pigs be all right for the night."

" You've heard nothing, then ? Seen no one ? "

Farrar felt he must intervene. " Steady, sir," he said. " While you are asking questions the criminal may be getting away. It was certainly not John we heard talking." Then, turning to the man, he said : " A murder has just taken place, only a few minutes ago, and the murderer must be somewhere near. Have you seen or heard anyone ? "

John was still fingering his neck, and seemed dazed. " Murder, zur ? Who be murdered ? Not the missis, I 'opes ? "

" No, never mind who it is. Have you seen anyone ? " said Farrar impatiently.

" I do think I see sum'un in they woods just now " —his intellect was not quick. " Hurryin' away he were, but I tuk no sort of notice except about they pigs."

" Where ? " asked Kenyon : " Tell us quickly."

The man pointed in a vague fashion.

" Too much start," said Farrar. " In such a wood a man could easily elude pursuit. We'd better get back and fetch the police and a doctor, though the doctor won't be much use, I'm afraid."

Kenyon looked round distractedly.

" I can't leave my wife alone, but it is maddening to think that the man may be hiding within a few yards of us. You had better get back and tell Mrs. Kenyon I shan't be a minute, but I must look round. You come with me, John ; you've got a thick stick."

" Shall I come with you ? " asked Farrar.

" No, no, somebody must go for the police. Get the car out and get away as quickly as possible."

Farrar made his way back to the study, and stepped inside with a feeling of repugnance.

Moira and the maid-of-all-work had lifted the body on to a sofa and covered it with a rug. She was outwardly calm, but her face was a deadly white, and the strain of her mental anguish was patent. A shudder ran through her body.

" Where is Mr. Kenyon ? " she asked.

" He is searching the woods for the murderer, with the man John. He told me to say he would be back in a moment, and meanwhile I was to go for the police and a doctor."

" Yes, do," she said in a dazed voice. " Of course, we must get the police here at once." She seemed hardly to realise what she was saying. Farrar glanced round.

" No one must touch this room until they come. I suppose you really oughtn't to have moved the body." Then, as he realised that she was on the verge of a breakdown, " Never mind, Mrs. Kenyon. I'll see to everything."

Moira suddenly broke down. " Oh, the misery of it all ! Poor Kitty ! I can almost see the news-boys shouting out the news." She sank into a chair and sobbed hysterically. " Oh, go, please go," she said impatiently. " I'll be all right."

Kenyon's car was kept in a shed a little way down the road, at a farmhouse where the chauffeur lodged —a quiet man, with a face like a weasel, named Hunter. It appeared that he had been for a walk, and was having a wash in his room.

Bo

Farrar waited impatiently until he appeared, full of apologies for the delay, and they set off to the village of Littleworth.

An unpretentious cottage bore a notice " County Police " on the door. The local constable was digging in his garden. When he had heard Farrar's story, he placed his spade deliberately in the ground and took his coat from the hedge. " I'd better call up Sergeant Curtis at Ketworth ; he's my chief. Then I'll come up myself." He was a man of slow speech and slower action.

" All right," said Farrar. " I'll go for the doctor."

" You can 'phone him from here, if you like, sir. Dr. Weaver lives just beyond the station."

Having 'phoned the doctor, and been assured that he would go straight to the cottage, Farrar felt that he was entitled to some stimulant, and sought the " Ivy Bush."

The sight of jolly farmers and country folk drinking large slievers of beer restored his mind to normal.

The landlord he knew well, and he caught at the chance of a few minutes' conversation on trivial matters before returning to the scene of the tragedy at the cottage.

" Anyone staying here just now ? " he asked, after he had ordered his drink.

" Just an American couple seeing the neighbourhood, and an actor fellow."

" What's his name ? " asked Farrar casually.

" Just a moment, sir. Here, Mary, what's the name of that actor ? "

His daughter, from the other side of the bar,

answered over her shoulder, " Anthony. He's in the smoking-room. Anyone want him ? "

" Anthony ? Not George Anthony, by any chance ? " asked Farrar.

" I dunno," said the landlord, dusting the counter. It evidently did not interest him greatly.

What a curious coincidence if it turned out to be George, Farrar thought, for he was the rising star who took Kenyon's principal juvenile leads, and, of course, knew Kitty Lake very well. He finished his drink thoughtfully, and made his way to the smoking-room, where a solitary figure was sitting at the writing-table. As he turned his head, Farrar with a start recognised the face of the young actor George Anthony, whose rapid progress from an unknown man in his profession had been one of the events of the theatrical season.

" George ! " said Farrar. " Well, this is unexpected ! The landlord told me there was someone of your name stopping here, but I did not dream it was you. What on earth are you doing here ? "

The man addressed rose to his feet, showing a tall, slim, athletic figure, with clean-cut features and deep-set, restless eyes. He could not repress a slight look of repugnance at the presence of his visitor, but Farrar went on without waiting for an answer.

" Never mind that now ; you can tell me afterwards. George, a terrible thing has happened. You know Kenyon's cottage is not far from here—just over the hill, in fact ? Kitty Lake was staying with the Kenyons, and she has been murdered ! " He blurted his news out in one confused sentence.

Anthony sprang forward and gripped his arm.

" Murdered ? " The usually well-modulated voice was harsh. " You must be joking. When ? How ? Tell me quickly."

" This evening, perhaps an hour ago. I came straight for the police and the doctor."

Anthony released his arm and staggered back with a dazed look.

" Impossible ! I——" He stopped. " Come, let's go at once ; you can tell me on the way." Farrar glanced at him keenly. With a soldier's training, he had little use for actors.

" Come on, then. I've got the car outside."

He told the tale in curt, disjointed sentences as they raced up the hill to the ill-fated cottage and found the living-room filled with people. The doctor was there, and a police-sergeant named Curtis, from Ketworth, and a middle-aged man with red hair and moustache turning grey, who was talking to Kenyon, while the village constable stood before the closed door of the study. Mrs. Kenyon had gone to lie down.

" We are fortunate," said Kenyon, " if anything can be called fortunate in this dreadful business, in finding Superintendent Sinclair, the well-known Scotland Yard detective, still at Ketworth, where he was carrying out a tour of inspection."

Farrar and Anthony looked with curiosity at the man whose name was a household word, and found him a modest, unassuming person, totally unlike the detective of fiction. At the time, Superintendent Sinclair had reached the highest position of trust in his branch. His earlier years had been spent in India, but since he had joined the staff of Scotland Yard a

series of brilliant cases had made for him a reputation which was the envy and admiration of his colleagues. Yet, with all his success in his professional duties, in private life he had always remained the admirable, quiet, courteous, and large-hearted companion. Many a man in trouble had gone to him for advice, and never in vain. In appearance he was probably the least distinguished man in that company. Yet there were few of the dark secrets of the world which were not hidden closely in his mind.

Farrar addressed himself to Kenyon. "Did you find anyone in the woods?"

"No. You were right; it was hopeless. But he may have left some traces even in this dry weather. I have just been telling Mr. Sinclair the bare facts."

Farrar turned to the detective. "Are there any clues in the room, Mr. Sinclair?"

Sinclair replied in the slow, deliberate voice he always used when on duty. "I've only just arrived and am getting particulars; so you have just come in time."

"Won't you sit down?" said Kenyon. "We must not forget courtesy, even in times like these."

They took their places round the table, and Sinclair pulled out a formidable pipe, which he proceeded to light.

"Mr. Kenyon was telling me when you came in, Captain Farrar, that you were discussing a play of his in this room when you heard someone talking in the next room."

"Yes, that is so."

"You heard a man's voice. Could you catch any words?"

"Not from him; he was evidently keeping his voice purposely lowered."

"But you heard Miss Lake speak?"

"Yes—under some emotion, it seemed. She was crying, and said, 'Go away; only ruin can come of it,' or something like that, wasn't it, sir?" He turned to Kenyon, who nodded.

"Very well. Now, how long had Miss Lake been in the study?"

"About three-quarters of an hour, I should think. She went in when we started our reading."

Sinclair turned to Kenyon.

"Did you ask her to go, or did she say she would leave you?"

"Neither. She simply got up and walked out, without saying anything to us."

"Exactly; and went to the piano to play?"

"Yes."

"Now, Mr. Kenyon, I want you to think very carefully. While Captain Farrar was going round to the window, did you hear any scream or cry for help?"

"None whatever. The voice stopped, and I immediately tried to break open the door."

"I am afraid I must ask you a few personal questions, Mr. Kenyon. When Miss Lake came to visit you, was she in her usual spirits?"

Kenyon started. "It's curious you should ask that question. As a rule, she was always very bright and cheerful, and my wife had looked forward to having her here for that reason—they were very great friends. When she came, we both noticed that she was depressed and moody, and seemed to have

something on her mind. My wife twice found her crying."

"Can you tell me of anyone who is—well, a suitor, or likely to make an appointment with this young lady behind your back?"

"None at all; it is quite inexplicable. My wife and I have known Kitty since she was a child, and although she has, of course, had many admirers, her keenness on her profession has kept her heart-whole."

"She has not received any letters, to your knowledge, while she has been here?"

"No."

"You have seen no one about the place—any strangers or chance visitors?"

"None at all."

Sinclair wheeled round in his chair and addressed Anthony.

"Mr. Anthony, I understand you have acted with Miss Lake. As a matter of fact, I have seen you in one of our friend's brilliant plays." Kenyon bowed slightly. "Have you any idea of anyone who was much in her company, or likely to have done this thing?"

"Absolutely none. I did not think she had an enemy in the world, and I agree with Mr. Kenyon that she was wrapped up in her work and had not given a thought to matters of love, and she was certainly not a 'flirt,' to use a vulgar word."

Sinclair remained in deep thought for so long that Kenyon broke the silence, which was becoming oppressive.

"My wife can tell you more of Kitty than anyone else. Shall I fetch her?"

Sinclair turned to Farrar. " Perhaps you would not mind calling Mrs. Kenyon ? " he said.

Kenyon looked at Sinclair with surprise and was about to speak, but the stolid look on the detective's face checked him.

" Why, certainly," said Farrar, jumping up briskly. He went to the door leading to the old-fashioned staircase, entirely enclosed in wood, which is common in old cottages. The moment the door was shut Sinclair turned to Kenyon.

" How long has Captain Farrar been in your employment ? " he asked quickly.

" About three months. He served in the Army and was very well recommended. I find him most useful. He has considerable ability."

" Where did he come from ? "

" I believe he had been serving in India, and while out there had an attack of fever."

" Strange," said Sinclair thoughtfully. " Has he any friends ? "

" Now that you mention it, he did have a brother officer staying down here with him—a very charming fellow named Forester, or Fortescue, or some such name. He seemed to be an extraordinarily well-read man, and had travelled all over the world. Some of his stories, if he was telling the truth, were more strange than even my plays, which people think weird enough."

" What was he like to look at, this officer ? "

" It is difficult to say. He was what we generally call the usual Army type. A man about forty, I should think."

" And you say he was staying here ? "

"I really don't know; he may have just come down from London in his car. Farrar brought him here a couple of times, and, I believe, dined with him at Ketworth on several occasions. I have not seen him lately."

Sinclair was about to say something further when the staircase door opened, and Moira Kenyon came in. She was only twenty-two years old, though she had been married two years. Her hair was blue-black and her eyes deep violet, which betrayed her nationality. There was a faint touch of sadness about her, a far-away look as though she were dreaming of the Green Isle whence she came. Her face was dead-white as she advanced to the table, and her eyes were unnaturally bright.

Sinclair rose at her entrance. "I am sorry to trouble you, Mrs. Kenyon," he said in a soothing voice, motioning her to a chair. "I know you must be very upset, but would you mind telling me what happened this afternoon, as far as you are concerned?"

Moira sank into a chair, her head cupped in her hands, her elbows on the table.

"I was in the kitchen with Sarah Middleton, the village girl who helps me, and heard nothing until my husband was breaking down the door. I came out at once, wondering what was happening, and we both went in together. At first I thought the room was empty, and then I saw Kitty lying on the floor."

"You saw Captain Farrar?"

"Yes, he came through the window as we entered the room."

"You can't throw any light on the question as to the identity of this man?"

"I am absolutely in the dark. Kitty has never told me of anyone she knew outside our circle of friends, and I have never known her receive a letter from anyone while she has been here."

"Did she ever go out while she has been staying with you?"

"Only for two motor-rides, to see the country, which was quite new to her. Hunter, our chauffeur, drove her round and showed her the sights. Living in London as she did, she was always very keen on the country."

"You were very fond of each other? Pardon the question."

"We were more like sisters, Mr. Sinclair, and always confided everything to each other."

"Thank you very much," said Sinclair. "We need not detain you, Mrs. Kenyon; you look as though you ought to get a rest."

She rose without a word, and went slowly back to her room.

"Well," said Sinclair, "I don't think we can carry the matter much further to-night. Doctor, we needn't keep you; I shall want you here in the morning. Jones," he said, turning to the constable, "the motor-ambulance is waiting outside; you'd better take the body to the mortuary at Littleworth."

Sergeant Curtis rose to his feet. "No," said Sinclair, holding up his hand, "you needn't go; there are two constables with the ambulance; we will go into the next room." He turned to the others. "I am afraid I must ask you to stay here for the

night. It will be very uncomfortable, but I can't help that."

"Do you wish me to remain as well?" asked Anthony in surprise.

"If you please."

"We have only two bedrooms—our own and poor Kitty's," said Kenyon. "There is this room, and the study, but I don't suppose anyone would care to sleep there," he added with a shudder.

"On the contrary," said Sinclair quietly, "I propose to spend the night in there, though possibly not to sleep. Will you three gentlemen stay in this room, and not leave the place?"

"I don't think there will be much sleep for any of us to-night," said Anthony, with a haggard look.

Kenyon looked at Sinclair in surprise. "You wish us all to remain in here?" he asked.

"You see," said the detective, half closing his eyes, "there's just a chance the murderer may return—he may have left some clue in his hurry. I don't want anyone wandering round the garden. I am armed. If you are in here, he can't come in this way."

Sinclair beckoned Curtis, and the two men went into the ill-omened study and pushed to the door, leaving the other three in astonished silence.

Sergeant Curtis had remained silent during the entire conversation, overawed by the presence of Sinclair. He knew that here was a good chance for him to learn something from the great detective, and that he himself would have charge of the case unless the county authorities appealed to Scotland Yard for help. Sinclair's presence was a mere accident, and he could not count upon his remaining.

Once inside the study, Sinclair spoke rapidly, in a low voice.

" I know I have no right to interfere in this case at all, Curtis—it is your job—but there are some very interesting points, and I would like to stay here to-night. You must go back to Ketworth, and come back with as many officers as you can bring early to-morrow, as we shall have the usual crowd of morbid sightseers—as well as a host of pressmen—when the crime becomes known."

" Very good, sir, but can you make anything of it ? To me it seems a very dark business."

" I will tell you in the morning," said Sinclair, " when I hope to have some definite information. Meanwhile, do you mind slipping out through this window ? " He led Curtis to the French windows, which had been closed, and opened them wide. " Now, just skirt this wall—no, not that way ; that is where Captain Farrar came round—the other side, past the kitchen, and so across the garden to the main road."

Curtis looked at him with curiosity. " I would like to know your reasons for all these precautions," he said.

" You shall know to-morrow. Good night."

. . . . . .

The three men sat in vacant silence round the table of the living-room after Sinclair had gone. Kenyon went to the sideboard and produced a decanter and syphon in a silver stand, and cut-glass goblets—he always hated anything common—and filled their glasses.

" What on earth is Sinclair up to ? " asked Farrar,

sipping his drink with relish. " It's mighty uncomfortable in this room. What about having the door open ? It's a warm night."

" As you like," said Kenyon indifferently. " I expect he's got something up his sleeve, but these detectives always like to create an air of mystery. It may be just bluff."

Anthony sat huddled up in a chair ; he seemed dazed with the horror of the crime.

Kenyon turned to him. " What were you doing down here, George ? " he asked. " And why on earth didn't you let us know you were staying in Littleworth ? "

" Well, it's partly a chance visit, as I was taking a holiday, and partly because I thought I would look you up. I have been three days at Littleworth, but did not like to disturb you, as it looked like butting in to get a principal part in your new play. I wish to God I had come."

" I don't see that you could have done anything," said Kenyon, rather stiffly.

" Perhaps not, but one feels, in a case like this, that something might have happened to prevent this awful business."

The strain of the day had been great, and, in spite of Anthony's prophecy, all three were at last asleep, Kenyon on the sofa, and the other two in armchairs.

In the room beyond, Sinclair sat in the dark, keeping his vigil, every nerve on the stretch. A loaded revolver and an electric torch lay ready to hand on the table. Faintly in the distance he heard the hours strike from the village clock. The night sounds of the countryside floated up from the valley—the

restless movements of animals, the sound of motors on the distant main road, and the sudden rustle of leaves in the thick woods. It was a soft, hot night, without a moon—a night when creatures of evil are abroad. In the stillness, the ticking of a clock could be heard from the living-room like the sound of the ticking of the death-watch. Twice he tiptoed across the room and softly pushed open the battered door which hung by its hinges. Then he went back to his seat by the window, waiting and staring out into the thick darkness. As the first faint streaks of dawn were showing in the sky, he sat up stiffly in his chair as a dark figure crept slowly from the woods.

## CHAPTER II

## CLUES

It is said that news can be sent by the natives of South Africa by some uncanny means as fast as by telegraph, but the rapidity with which the news of a murder leaks out is as wonderful.

Perhaps the maid-of-all-work told it, or the constable let it out. Who knows ? But certain it was that with the morning came curious villagers, as Sinclair had predicted, leaning over the little gate and pointing with excited gestures. Then a car stopped, and people got out and joined the group. When the police car arrived—to Sinclair's relief—quite a crowd had collected. Sergeant Curtis and three constables came briskly down the path.

It was a fine morning, and the dew was thick on the flowers. A breath of wind scented from the Wealden fields came across the great wooded valley, stretching away to the dim blue hills of the North Downs. The garden was fragrant with June flowers, and roses were in full bloom in this sheltered spot. It was hard to imagine that such a delightful place could have been the scene of so dark a crime which tainted the very air.

Sinclair stood at the door and took in the beauty of the picture. He was too hardened to feel the sinister influence which shrouded the others.

Moira had come down, pale-faced and with dark rings round her eyes, and had bravely gone to the kitchen, for men must eat, if women weep.

The three men in the living-room were still sunk in uneasy slumber, and Sinclair examined them critically with the skill of a student in physiognomy. No one looks his best when sleeping in an armchair, fully dressed and unwashed, and Sinclair felt his own chin doubtfully.

They were all three striking-looking men of different types. The playwright had a forceful, vigorous face and intellectual forehead ; over forty, but still youthful. His hair was greyish, but his complexion was so fresh still that it did not make for age—a face marked with intellect and command.

Anthony was of a different type. He had an eager, boyish face, sensitive and finely modelled, a face singularly adapted for picture postcards, with a mass of dark, curling hair, perhaps a little too long for good taste. His long, delicate fingers indicated the artist, and even in sleep he was admirable, though, to Sinclair's judgment, rather weak and emotional.

Farrar had the face of a typical soldier, with a firm mouth and the appearance of ruthlessness. Sinclair scrutinised him with a perplexed look, as if he were trying to recall something he had forgotten.

Sergeant Curtis came in, and the noise of his entry awakened the men. Kenyon stretched his arms and yawned, and a look of terror came into his eyes, his lips set tight, and a shudder went through him ; then his strong mind gripped the situation, and he was master of himself. Anthony sprang up at once,

covered his face with his hands, and moaned in recollection. Farrar became wide awake in an instant, with that peculiar quality instinctive in soldiers who have seen active service. He greeted Sinclair with a smile, and asked whether anything had happened in the night in a casual voice. While the others were talking, he walked across to the sideboard and helped himself to a neat whisky.

" There are a number of men with cameras, trying to come in," said Curtis.

" Keep them out," said Sinclair shortly.

" I have done so, but there are fresh cars arriving every moment, containing pressmen with huge notebooks. Some of them are working round in skirmishing order through the woods. They will be in the garden before long."

" Bring an officer from the road, and post him in the garden. This is most important, as I haven't been able to make a thorough investigation yet."

" Very good, sir," said Curtis, and issued his orders.

Mrs. Kenyon had laid breakfast, and invited the men to come to the table. Sinclair contented himself with a cup of coffee, and, thanking his hostess, took Curtis into the study.

The sun was shining brightly through the open window, giving the room a cheerful look in the morning light, but the horrible stain over the carpet told of the ghastly tragedy of the night before.

" Now listen, Curtis, carefully. While these people are having breakfast I will tell you all I know, for it is really your job, and at any moment I may be called

away for an important case which I know is pending."

"I am very glad you were on the spot," said Curtis warmly.

"First as to the evidence you heard last night. I want to call your attention to the fact that Miss Lake entered the study of her own accord and started playing the piano. Now, there may be nothing in it, but piano-playing is a very old trick to distract attention. The girl left the window open while she locked the door, so that it looks extremely like a definite appointment. All this is quite obvious. But I can add to the evidence."

Curtis leant forward to listen.

"When I arrived, I only had a moment for examination before the body was moved. The knife with which the crime was committed was lying on the floor—a very sharp blade with a wooden handle, almost a dagger, and of a type much used in trench warfare. I have wrapped it up carefully there on the table, to be examined for fingerprints, but I will hazard a guess that the criminal took care to wear a glove, or—I wonder." Sinclair remained lost in thought for a moment, and then went on: "When I searched the room I found this." He produced a crumpled sheet of paper from his pocket.

"This is a letter written in type, which the dead girl must have dropped as she was murdered, or just before. It was lying near the music-stool." He spread the letter out.

"MY DARLING," it ran,—"It's no good, I cannot keep away. It is asking too much. I must see

you, even if it is for the last time. Our love is not a sordid thing, and we can face the world if necessary, but if you say the word I will go out of your life once and for all, even if it means the end of my career. I will come round in the hope of seeing you to-morrow. Try and be alone for a few minutes in the study. I cannot write more, but you know my heart is in your keeping.

"Your devoted lover."

That was all.

"What do you make of it?" asked Curtis. "It seems to me obvious that someone made an assignation and kept it, with terrible results."

"Perhaps," said Sinclair, "but a typewritten letter is suspicious. It may be a decoy—such things have happened."

"What have you done?"

"I examined the ground as well as I could, but of course the whole lot came in here, so it's rather hopeless. There are distinct marks on the grass outside which may lead us somewhere. We had better take a few impressions at once, while the marks are fresh."

The two men went through the open window, where the sinister wood came to within a few yards of the cottage. Sinclair was expert in dealing with indications, and there were things here which could be read plainly by trained eyes. Small signs, invisible to the ordinary eye, showed where Farrar had come round the cottage and entered the window. There were also the impressions of the hurrying feet of Kenyon and Farrar as they ran across the grass.

This only served to confirm the evidence which had been given ; but there was something further. Two distinct tracks, though faint, led to and from the wood, and then were lost, but broken twigs and smashed fern fronds showed where a man had passed. Careful measurements of these footmarks were taken and a record made which might lead some man to the gallows.

They had scarcely regained the study when they were aware of a maniac who ran from the woods, shouting and breathless. He was intercepted by the constable on duty and conducted to the window of the study.

" Who's this ? " asked Sinclair sharply.

" Allow me to introduce myself—I represent the *Sunday Imperial*, and I have found something which may help you in your investigation. Here is my card."

The cheeky boy, scarcely out of his teens, handed a card to Sinclair with complete *sang-froid*, and lit a cigarette.

The old detective laughed to himself ; he knew the type, and secretly admired them for their keenness and grit, but outwardly he showed nothing, and said: " Well, what is it ? "

" Mr. Sinclair, I have been searching the woods, and found this glove. Mind you, I might have taken it to the paper and made a good story out of it, but I thought I'd better bring it to you."

He handed the glove to Sinclair, took a note-book from his pocket, and coolly sat down and began to sketch the room.

" That will do," said Sinclair. " Thank you for the glove, which may be very useful, but you must go

now. I cannot give one journalist a chance the others haven't got."

"All right, Mr. Sinclair," said the boy with a grin. "By the way, have you any theory about the crime, or who did it, by any chance?"

"Get out," said Sinclair, laughing in spite of himself.

The glove belonged to a left hand, and was of chamois leather. It had evidently been dropped recently. Sinclair examined it quickly and then handed it to Curtis. "Keep this, but do not attach too much importance to it. I have one more thing to tell you. Last night I stayed in this room—I fancied the man might come back for that letter."

"And did he?"

"Yes; that is, he tried to. I had left the window open. He came creeping up the garden, and I waited for him, but he evidently suspected that I was on the watch, and didn't venture close enough. It was as dark as pitch, and before I knew it he had melted away. Pursuit was useless, and would only have put him on his guard."

"You mean he might try again?"

"Possibly, but I don't think so," said Sinclair, with a baffling look on his face.

Curtis was puzzled, and a thought struck him. "Then the marks on the ground may have been made when he came back in the night?"

"No, there are two sets; but they are made by the same man."

"One last question, Mr. Sinclair. Have you any idea yourself? I know you have a wonderful instinct."

Sinclair looked at Curtis dubiously. "I would rather you work on your own lines."

They returned to the living-room, where the others were standing in an uneasy group, talking in whispers.

The doctor had arrived, and was awaiting Sinclair's instructions. Kenyon approached Sinclair—his face bore traces of deep emotion. "Do you wish us to remain here any longer, Mr. Sinclair, or can we go? This place is hateful to me, and I shall be glad to take my wife away. She is terribly upset, and I fear a breakdown."

"There is no reason now why you should remain; in fact, I think it would be advisable to hand the place over to the police."

"Thank you; then we will get back to town. I cannot do any more writing at present, or even read through my play, with this thing hanging over us. It is a strange thing, Mr. Sinclair," he added with a wan smile, "that I who have made a name for writing gruesome plays should have been caught in such a horrible affair. Anthony, are you coming to town with us?"

Anthony gave a start.

"Yes, I suppose so," he said in a dead voice. "I must go and get my bag from the 'Ivy Bush,' and I suppose we shall all be wanted at the inquest?"

"Certainly," said Sinclair, "but the case is now with Sergeant Curtis; you had better leave your addresses with him."

"Very well," said Kenyon. "Farrar, will you please order the car? And you can take two months'

holiday," he added coldly. " I shall have to take a rest myself after this."

The secretary looked at him in astonishment. " You will want me again after that, sir, I hope ? " he asked.

" Oh, I expect so, but at the moment I simply want to get away. I will give you a cheque for your salary. You'd better call at my London house, and I can give you any further instructions there. Mr. Sinclair, you know my London address ? " Sinclair nodded. " All right, then ; I will go and tell my wife, as there is nothing further to detain us."

" Do you want me for anything, Mr. Sinclair ? " asked Dr. Weaver when the others had gone.

" I would like a word with you in here."

Sinclair led the way into the study and pushed to the broken door. Dr. Weaver was a large man with a healthy red face and a genial manner ; in fact, a typical country practitioner. But, alone with the detective, he seemed ill at ease.

" Dr. Weaver," said Sinclair, in a quiet, incisive manner, " you will probably be wanted at the inquest."

The doctor started. " Yes ? "

" When did you last see Miss Lake ? "

All the stuffing seemed to have gone out of the doctor, and his face became pale.

" What do you mean ? " he stammered.

" I just want you to tell me the truth. Miss Lake had visited you at Littleworth. How many times ? "

" Only once. It was a private professional visit, and I did not feel called upon to say anything about it."

"How did she come?"

"By car. Hunter, Mr. Kenyon's chauffeur brought her down."

"And for what purpose?"

"That I decline to state."

"Very well, we will leave it at that; but you will have to make a statement at the inquest. You were proposing to visit her at this house."

"How do you know that?"

Sinclair put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a letter, which he handed to the wretched doctor.

"I found this in Miss Lake's handbag. I believe that is your writing."

The doctor took the letter and read it mechanically.

"That is so," he said in a faltering voice.

"This letter will be produced at the inquest. I have only one question to ask you, which you needn't answer unless you like. Did you keep that appointment?"

"Most certainly not. I have absolute proof to that effect."

"Very good. That is all I wanted to ask. You may go now, Dr. Weaver."

The unhappy man slouched out of the room without a word, and Sinclair threw himself into an armchair and lit his pipe.

## CHAPTER III

## THE STRICKEN HOUSE

Mrs. Lake lived in a flat in St. John's Wood with her two daughters, Kitty and Madeline. Her considered opinion was that the trouble she had taken to produce and bring up the two girls should find its reward in their whole-hearted devotion and support now that she was left without a husband to provide for her.

The late Mr. Lake, in departing from this world, had carelessly forgotten to make any provision for his wife and children—having optimistically trusted to luck, and to his artistic abilities, which the markets of the world failed to appreciate.

He left many debts, no assets, and a circle of cosmopolitan friends who mourned him for a day.

It was one of these—an inconsequential person of no importance—who had started Kitty off on her dramatic career—a child's part in a children's play, played with vivacity and latent talent.

An interested Hebrew had done the rest, and her sudden rise to the front rank had been one of those strange and daring flights which are the envy and the desire of less fortunate mortals.

Mrs. Lake joyed in her success not less from the reflected glory than from the material comforts which resulted from a steady income.

Her one dread was the ever-present thought that some day the girls might have yearnings after homes of their own, leaving her a lonely, deserted old woman.

The girls were twins—as like as twins can be. Mrs. Lake had playfully said at her club more than once that if Kitty had been taken ill or sprained an ankle, Madeline could have gone to the theatre and taken her part, and no one the wiser.

To the mother the home was ideal. Kitty earned good money and had bright prospects. To Madeline had fallen the harder part.

She was in charge of the flat, and took all responsibility from her mother, discharging her duties efficiently and without complaint. Mrs. Lake was free to entertain her circle of friends, play bridge at her club, and feel at peace with the world.

She was well preserved, white haired, and fresh-complexioned, with several ailments of a minor nature of which she was modestly proud.

At all times she had complete inability to face realities.

The twins were true blondes, with real corn-gold hair—not the peroxide variety—and blue eyes. Fine-skinned they were, and lithe and buoyant. The petulant curve of the mouth suggested temper, but was, rather, inherent stubbornness.

A weak type, one would have said, more fitted to lolling in a punt up-river in summer evenings, and jazzing on winter nights ; but such a judgment would have been faulty.

Both had grit and character and limitless pluck. Kitty had shown it in her work on the stage, and the

lure of the films or the exotic charm of revue had failed to tempt her from the straight path of the legitimate stage.

When Madeline had quietly announced her engagement to Arthur Barratt, her mother's tears and querulous plaints had failed to move her.

"But what do you know about him, my dear, after all? And what is to become of me?" had been her protest. "I suppose you never thought of your mother. Young people are so selfish."

Madeline had listened to it all—many times. Kitty had backed her up; the sisters were always in each other's confidence completely.

When Arthur Barratt had appeared, a clean, decent, and successful business man, Mrs. Lake had been slightly mollified. He was already a junior partner in his firm, and hinted that he and Madeline were not in a desperate hurry. A suggestion that they would not leave her alone—she should live with them—cleared the air.

Mrs. Lake saw visions of a wider scope for her activities. The young people would, of course, want her advice on many subjects. It would be quite interesting at her club to tell the news. "My Madeline—foolish girl—has got herself engaged, you know—oh, quite a nice young fellow, junior partner in Stiggens & Green—so clever and so fond of me; and you know how I have felt, not having a boy of my own," and so on.

It was on this unguarded household that the blow fell.

Madeline had gone out for an early purchase, and saw the headlines of the morning papers.

In the confusion of the night before no one at the cottage had sent word—it was too remote for the telegraph.

Madeline bought a paper, and read with a dull pain growing round her heart. The kindly woman at the shop brought her a seat and cold water. Then she struggled blindly home, her mind mercifully numbed for the moment. It must be some foolish delusion—some mistake.

She found her mother lying prostrated on her bed. The paper had come while Madeline had been out. She was weeping frantically and without restraint, moaning, " What will become of us ? Poor Kitty ! "

Madeline's pluck came to her rescue.

" We must 'phone for Arthur," she said, feeling intense need of help. " I wonder he has not come before."

She rose to go to the 'phone when a ring came at the front door. Mr. Kenyon was waiting outside. He took the hands of each in turn in silent sympathy. He had hurried straight to them, hoping to be in time to break the news.

" Tell us about it," said Mrs. Lake in a broken voice. " We have only seen a bare notice in the paper, and they put these things in such a heartless way—they seem only anxious to make sales for their papers."

Kenyon told them what had happened, softening the tale as best he could ; but he felt the full horror of the deed, with these poor defenceless women listening to his every word.

" But poor Kitty—without an enemy in the world ! " said Mrs. Lake, crying hysterically. " She

was such a quiet girl, and so interested in her work."

"I know," he replied. "It's impossible to imagine that anyone but a madman could have done this fiendish act."

Madeline intervened. "We were wondering why Arthur hadn't come—I should have thought he would have been round here at once."

"I will call him up for you, if you like," Kenyon said, and went to the 'phone. "Is Mr. Barratt at the office?" he asked, when he had got the number.

"Who's that speaking, please?" came the answer.

"Mr. Robert Kenyon. I want to speak to Mr. Barratt on a very urgent matter."

"Mr. Barratt has not been in the office for two days. We do not know where he is—probably somewhere abroad; he often has to go there for the firm. . . . No, he is not on the 'phone at his house. . . . No. I think he is living at an hotel at present."

Kenyon put down the receiver and reported the conversation.

"It's most unfortunate that he should be away at this time." He was obviously the man to help at this crisis.

"I suppose we shall have to go down to Littleworth at once," said Madeline wearily.

"I'll get in touch with the police first," said Kenyon. Then, in a low voice, to Madeline he said, "You see, Kitty's body is in their hands until after the inquest."

Mrs. Lake heard the words.

"How horrible! I hadn't thought of that, and all the publicity and articles in the papers!"

"I know it's horrible," said Kenyon, "but you must try and be brave and go through with it. I will get them to spare you and Madeline as much as they can."

"I wonder where Arthur can have got to?" Madeline asked suddenly. "It's not like him to go away without telling us."

"Oh, France or Belgium, I expect; you know he often has to go there on business."

Madeline looked doubtful.

"He will be terribly upset, poor boy," said Mrs. Lake. "You know he was almost as fond of poor Kitty as he was of Madeline, though of course not quite."

Kenyon started, in spite of himself, and looked intently at the expression which came on Madeline's face.

"Well, of course they were extraordinarily alike, in character as well as appearance." He addressed Mrs. Lake, but was watching Madeline keenly. She was sitting rigid in her chair, with her hands clenched, and a curious fixed look was in her eyes.

"Well, I am afraid I must go, Mrs. Lake," said Kenyon, rising. "I came straight here in the hope of sparing you the shock of seeing this in the papers. I have taken Moira to my London house. She is so upset that I have sent for a trained nurse, and I cannot leave her for long."

"It is very good of you to have come, especially as we have no one to advise us. I am very sorry about Moira; you must get back to her at once." It was Mrs. Lake who spoke. Madeline was still sitting staring into vacancy, her head resting on her hand.

Mrs. Lake was a fond mother, but was not made of the stuff that can meet a sudden emergency without someone on whom to lean. Her whole life had been bound up in her two girls, and now a ghastly tragedy had shattered her home.

" There is one thing, Mrs. Lake," said Kenyon, at the door. " I should not stay here, if I were you. People will be calling here, trying to interview you and to get photographs. Can't you and Madeline get away for a bit ? "

" We have nowhere to go," she replied helplessly. " We are not well off, and poor Kitty was the bread-winner of the family." She broke down again in tears.

Kenyon hesitated. " A friend of mine has a little bungalow at Shoring which is always put at my disposal, and everything is kept ready. It is very quiet down there, and right on the sea. How would it be if you went there ? I can send you down in my car, and you can come up for the inquest. You need tell no one except the police where you have gone, so that you will not be disturbed. I am sure the very air and change will do you both good."

Madeline looked up at last and said, " That is most kind of you, Mr. Kenyon. I am sure mother and I will be only too pleased to accept."

Mrs. Lake looked round in a helpless manner. " I don't know, I'm sure ; it's very good of you, but I hardly like to leave here—and yet I suppose there is no harm." She gave a sigh.

Kenyon and Madeline exchanged glances.

" Here is the address," he said, handing it to her. " I will wire to the woman who looks after it to get things ready. I will 'phone to the police and tell

them where you are. The car will be round this afternoon, and you can call and see the local police on the way." He lowered his voice. " You will want to see her, and I expect the police will give you permission."

When he had gone, Mrs. Lake turned to her daughter.

" Do you think we ought to go away, dear, when Arthur may be here at any moment? Don't you think he will be angry at our accepting this from Mr. Kenyon? "

She was surprised at the sudden passion which flared up in Madeline's face. " If he chooses to desert us at a time like this, he cannot blame us for accepting other people's help. If he comes back he will have to find us. He can ask the police, I suppose."

" I expect you are right, dear," said Mrs. Lake weakly. " It will be a comfort to get away. It's horrible to think of people coming here, and perhaps even asking us to write for the papers."

In the afternoon Kenyon's car arrived. They were only too anxious to go. Already there had been visitors who had not believed they were out, and kept on ringing. The flat was in a state of siege. The telephone was constantly going, and importunate men were asking for intimate details.

The rapid journey through the summer afternoon somewhat revived their spirits, until the sight of the police-station at Ketworth brought back to their minds the grim horror of the previous day.

Sergeant Curtis was a kindly soul, and tactfully conducted them to a private room at the Bell Hotel, where they could talk in quiet.

There was nothing that Mrs. Lake or Madeline could tell him which could throw any light on the crime, but they gave him the simple details of their lives.

"Then there is no one, Mrs. Lake," said Curtis in conclusion, "about whom you have any suspicion?"

"None whatever, Mr. Curtis. As Mr. Kenyon said to us, I can imagine no one but a madman doing this thing."

"And you, Miss Lake?" he asked, turning to Madeline.

To the astonishment of her mother, Madeline answered:

"I would rather not say, if you don't mind."

"But surely, my dear, if you have any idea, it is your duty to tell this officer."

Madeline turned on her mother sharply. "I have said everything I am going to say. It is for the police to find the criminal."

There was an awkward pause, and then Sergeant Curtis turned to Mrs. Lake. "You would like to go across to Littleworth. I will come with you, so that you will have no difficulty."

Mrs. Lake understood. "That is very kind of you," she said.

An outhouse at the back of the "Ivy Bush" served as a temporary mortuary, and there they saw her, sleeping peacefully, and beautiful and fragile as a flower.

Sergeant Curtis started as he looked at the dead and living sisters—a wraith come to view the poor clay it had occupied.

Do

Madeline was strangely quiet and composed, and gently led her mother away to the waiting car.

Nor did she speak during the ride to the sea, till she helped the stricken woman into the bungalow.

The brightness had gone out of her life—and there was no comfort anywhere.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE INQUEST

The club-room at the " Ivy Bush " at Littleworth was crowded to overflowing for the inquest, and many people hung about the doors, anxious to see what was going on, with the usual morbid interest which attaches to murder cases.

There were many cars filled with women who had come from far, and the inn did a roaring trade.

The witnesses and the Press were with difficulty accommodated in the room, and there was little space for the general public.

The coroner was a self-satisfied, pompous little man, who loved petty bullying of witnesses and juries. He opened the proceedings with an outline of the crime.

Mrs. Lake gave evidence of identification. She and Madeline were pathetic figures in black. The coroner spared them as much as he could. He asked a few questions as to whether the dead girl had known anyone at all well, and it was noticed that he emphasised the word " well " in a peculiar manner.

All this was just in accordance with the ordinary procedure, but thrills were to follow fast. After Kenyon and Farrar had told their story, which has been already detailed, Superintendent Sinclair gave his evidence.

"When you arrived, Mr. Sinclair," said the coroner, after a few preliminary questions, "what did you find?"

"I went into the study, where the murder had been committed, and found the body lying on a sofa."

"Yes?"

"The throat had been cut with a terrible slash."

"So that suicide was out of the question?"

"Most certainly."

"It would require a strong man to cause such a wound?"

Sinclair thought for a moment. "Not necessarily. It depends."

The coroner raised his eyebrows. "But surely a blow of that nature——" he said in the supercilious manner he sometimes assumed.

Sinclair resented it, and said quietly, "It all depends. I have given my opinion, sir."

The coroner knew better than to cross swords with the famous detective. "Continue," he said.

"The door had been burst open. The lock had given way. It was not a very strong affair. The screws had come out of the framework."

"It was not a morticed lock, then?"

"No, just the ordinary kind. It would not take a great amount of strength to burst it open."

"Anything else in the room?"

"Yes, there was a note in typewriting on the floor, near the music-stool. I have it here." He read the letter, and the eyes of those in court wandered towards Mrs. Lake, who was weeping silently.

" I showed the note to Sergeant Curtis. That night I spent in the room, and took care that the door leading into the living-room could not be used by the murderer, should he try and return to recover this note. I therefore arranged for the three gentlemen who were present to remain in the living-room. I left the window opening into the garden wide open."

" And did he come back ? "

" Yes."

There was a gasp in the room, and reporters got busy with their pencils. Sinclair continued :

" I waited, sitting in an armchair facing the window, for hours. It must have been about three-thirty when I became aware of a very faint sound outside. I crept to the window, and could just make out a dim figure coming from the wood. He was advancing to the house, and appeared to have no head."

" No head ? " asked the coroner.

" Oh, there's nothing mysterious about that. I expect he was holding something over his head, so that his face should not show in the night. I made no sound, but he must have been frightened or lost his nerve, and he melted away."

" You did not try and capture him ? " asked the coroner, with just a shade of irony in his voice.

" No, sir," said Sinclair shortly.

" You will excuse me asking one who has such a great name in the detective service, but may I ask why ? "

" For several reasons. First, because it would have been no use on so dark a night. Second, it would

have put him on his guard and prevented him from trying again. And——" He paused.

"And the other reason?"

"I knew who it was," said Sinclair calmly.

There was silence in the room, eloquent of emotion, and everyone leant forward, expecting to hear a dramatic announcement.

"And who was it?" asked the coroner testily—he hated mysteries.

"That I do not propose to state at this stage."

There was a pause, and then the coroner said: "This seems to be a strange method of procedure, but I suppose you are waiting for further evidence."

"I had better go on with my statement, sir. There is little more to tell. If I had been able to see the body where it lay, it might have made things easier, but when I arrived it had been placed on the sofa. I found the knife with which the crime was committed lying on the floor." He pointed to the table, whereon were the various "exhibits."

"The handle of this knife has been already examined for fingerprints, but it is evident that the murderer took precautions."

"By wearing a glove, for example?" said the coroner, pointing to the yellow chamois glove lying on the table.

"Perhaps," said Sinclair.

"I understand that this glove was picked up in the wood and brought to you, Mr. Sinclair. Is that so?"

"That is quite correct, sir, but it may have nothing to do with the crime."

The coroner gave an impatient gesture. " Really, sir, I should have thought it was pretty obvious. Please continue."

" We found traces of footmarks outside the window, leading to the wood, and measurements of these have been taken by Sergeant Curtis and myself."

" Do you wish to ask any questions, Mr. Knight ? " said the coroner, turning to the lawyer who was representing the family.

" Just one, sir. Mr. Sinclair, you say there were footmarks outside. When did you observe them ? "

" The morning after the murder."

" Exactly. So that they may have been made by your nocturnal visitor ? "

" I was expecting that question," said Sinclair, unperturbed. " There were two sets, and the fact that they were identical led me to believe that they were made by the same person."

" About the letter which we have heard read—it is in type, I believe ? "

" Yes, and we are trying to ascertain what kind of typewriter was used."

" I suppose you did not try the machine in the house, did you?" asked the lawyer, with a thinly veiled sneer.

" On the contrary, that was the first step taken. The note was not written by the typewriter in the house ; that is quite certain."

" I have no more questions to ask," said the lawyer, and sat down.

Sergeant Curtis merely confirmed Sinclair's

evidence, and the proceedings were getting commonplace when the doctor who had conducted the autopsy stepped briskly forward.

" Cause of death ? " he said, in answer to a question. " Yes, there is no doubt about that. A savage cut severing the windpipe and the left carotid artery and jugular vein. Death must have been instantaneous."

" You say a savage blow. Do you mean one requiring great strength ? " The coroner glanced maliciously at Sinclair.

" I should say that only a man of great strength could have done it. It was a terrible gash."

" So that you would hardly agree with Superintendent Sinclair when he said that there was a doubt about it ? "

" I hardly understood what he meant," said the doctor guardedly, " but I can only state what I have seen with my own eyes."

" Is there anything else peculiar with regard to the actual wound ? " said the coroner, looking at his notes.

" Yes, the crime was committed by a left-handed man."

Again there was a thrill of excitement in the crowded room.

" A right-handed man would have obviously cut from left to right to get the maximum force, but this was from right to left. I do not think there is any doubt about that."

The coroner shuffled uneasily. " Doctor," he said, " I have to ask you a question of a very painful nature, but it is necessary in the ends of justice. You

examined the victim of the murder. Did you find anything as to her condition? "

" Yes, sir," said the doctor, clearly and deliberately. " She was in a certain condition."

Mr. Knight was on his feet in a moment. " I protest, sir. This has nothing to do with the case, and I submit that this attempt to blacken the character of the poor girl is outrageous."

" I must override your objection," was the stern answer. "We have here a possible motive for the crime which was otherwise missing."

Mrs. Lake rose to her feet, quivering with anger. " It is a lie, a monstrous lie, and you have no right to say such things."

" Sit down, madam, please," said the coroner. " We are all very sympathetic, but you are represented by a legal adviser, and you must allow him to speak for you."

It was some time before order could be restored and Mrs. Lake had been led from the room by her daughter.

Dr. Weaver was the next witness called. He appeared ill at ease when he entered the box, and glanced apprehensively round the court.

The coroner scrutinised his notes carefully, and then looked up at the witness.

" I understand," he said, " that Miss Lake consulted you previously? "

" Am I bound to answer that question? " the doctor asked nervously.

" Certainly," said the coroner. " You are here on oath ; you must tell us all you know."

" Very well, then. Miss Lake did visit my house,

but I felt under no obligation to disclose the nature of her visit. It was in reference to what has already been stated in court. We do not wish to go into details."

"That is so. I take it that she was anxious with regard to her condition."

"She consulted me, and I strongly advised her to tell her mother."

"She wrote asking you to visit her at the cottage secretly?"

"She did. And I replied in a letter which I believe Superintendent Sinclair found—he showed it to me the morning after the murder."

The coroner put on his glasses, and, taking a paper from the table, read the following letter:

"DEAR MISS LAKE,—I am afraid I cannot accede to your request to visit you at Mr. Kenyon's cottage without the knowledge of your host and hostess.

"When you came to me, I gave you the best advice I could in the circumstances—to go home and consult your mother. I do not think a further conference could lead to any useful results. If, however, your mental condition is so desperate, you must have expert advice. I will arrange to see you privately, as you suggest, but I warn you that I can give you no other advice than that which I have already given.

"With regard to fee, please do not worry about that. I should not dream of making any charge.

"Yours faithfully,

"H. WEAVER."

" You wrote that letter, I think ? "

" Yes, I certainly wrote that. I would like to explain. Miss Lake was in such a nervous condition that I was afraid of serious consequences, and was willing to do anything in my power, as far as medical etiquette allowed, to help her."

" What exactly do you mean by that ? "

" To be quite plain, I was afraid she might commit suicide, or take some desperate course."

" Then you did not go to the cottage after all ? "

" Most emphatically no. I never saw her again."

" Would it not have been better," the coroner asked, " if you had volunteered this statement to the police at once ? "

" With all due respect, I disagree. I did not see that any useful purpose could be served, nor that it would throw any light upon the crime."

Mr. Knight had one question to ask.

" You are quite certain, Dr. Weaver, that it was not a question of hysteria or imagination ? "

" I am quite certain," said the doctor gravely, and stepped down from the box.

The last witness was Mr. Kenyon's chauffeur, Hunter. He went into the box with a look of bravado, purposely introduced, but he had the pasty face and shifting eyes of the Cockney, and was prepared to hold his own with any coroner in England.

" I understand that you drove Miss Lake in Mr. Kenyon's car on several occasions ? " asked the coroner.

" Yus, I drove 'er round the country and showed 'er all the most beautiful views on the Downs and by the sea " ; his manner was aggressive.

" Did she ever meet anyone during those drives ? "

" No one at all, yer honour ; she sat beside me and asked questions about everything—most interested she seemed."

" You drove her to Dr. Weaver, who lives at Littleworth ? "

" Well, it was this way. We was a-comin' back from Poolborough, and as we passed through Littleworth she laid 'er 'and on me arm and says, ' 'Unter, do you know of a doctor in this village ? ' At that moment we was a-passin' the doctor's house, and I, bein' observant, sees the plate on the gate. So I says, ' 'Ere's a doctor's, miss ; shall I stop ? ' And she went in, and was away about half an hour. She came out all upset, and nearly crying, she was, and told me to drive round for a bit before we went home."

" And that is all you can tell us ? "

" That's all, sir."

" All right ; you may stand down."

The chauffeur glanced at Sinclair, who had been watching him intently, and, with something almost like a wink, disappeared from the witness-box.

The heat in the room was oppressive, and the coroner adjourned the court at this stage of the proceedings.

The closely packed crowd streamed out of the hotel for a breath of fresh air, while the more robust went to the bar for refreshments.

Sinclair was met outside by a boy with a telegram, which he tore open. It was laconic : " Come at once, urgent. Boyce."

It was from his Chief in Scotland Yard, so he sought the coroner in his private room. "Have I your permission to go, sir? This is evidently important," he said, showing the telegram.

"I think you have stated all that is necessary," said the coroner rather stiffly. "But perhaps you have something to tell me you do not want made public?"

"No, sir, nothing," said Sinclair quietly.

"The police have no theory, then, as to the murderer?"

"The matter is in the hands of Sergeant Curtis. I do not think he contemplates any arrest at present."

"But you?" asked the coroner insinuatingly. "I rather gathered you had something up your sleeve."

"No, nothing; and, if you do not mind, I think I will get off."

"Very well. I hope the local police will be able to manage without your valuable help," the coroner snapped.

In a small private room, Sinclair found Mrs. Lake and her daughter with George Anthony. He gazed at the group with an inscrutable look, then he advanced and took Anthony's hand.

"I am glad you are looking after Mrs. Lake," he said. "It is a terrible time for them, and I am afraid a worse one is coming later on."

"You mean when they find out the murderer?"

"Exactly." Then he paused. "Mr. Anthony, I have a request to make you. If ever you need my help in this case, will you send for me at once? Don't forget."

Anthony looked at him in surprise. "I will certainly do so, Mr. Sinclair, though I don't see what you are driving at."

"Mr. Sinclair," said Madeline, "do you think they will find out who murdered my sister?"

"Most assuredly—and yet, I wonder. I would give a lot to be able to stay and watch the case. But that is impossible."

Sinclair went out into the yard, and found Kenyon standing by his car in deep dejection.

"This is a terrible business," he said; "made much worse by what we have heard this morning. Was it necessary, Mr. Sinclair? It seems so unfair to blacken the character of a dead person."

"I am afraid it had to come out in the ends of justice."

"The ends of justice! Everything dirty or sordid when dragged out in court is always excused by that phrase. I believe the lawyers and the police take as much delight in this as some nasty-minded youth in reading a certain type of Sunday paper."

"You are upset, Mr. Kenyon."

"Yes. I beg your pardon. The whole thing has got on my nerves. Mr. Sinclair, my wife has disappeared. On the day after the murder I went to see Mrs. Lake and Madeline, in the hope that I might be able to break the news to them. I had left my wife asleep, and had already arranged for a trained nurse to come and look after her. I had told the servants to see she was properly attended to, and never dreamed that anything could happen during the short time I was away. When I returned, I went

straight to her room, and found that she had gone. I questioned the servants, and no one had seen her leave or had any idea that she was going. It was an absolute mystery."

"What have you done about it?"

"I went to Scotland Yard and reported the matter. But you will realise my difficulty, Mr. Sinclair—I must keep this from the Press—at present, at any rate. There may be nothing in it. I know she was in an excited, nervous state, and she may have simply gone off to see friends without telling me, but I cannot get out of my head the possibility of something more serious."

"You mean?"

"One does not like to suggest, or even think of it, but a sudden shock like this might cause temporary derangement and a tendency to self-destruction."

For all his great powers of self-control, Kenyon's face showed evidence of the terrible anxiety he was feeling.

"It may be necessary to invoke the help of the public," Sinclair said.

"It may be, but, if it can possibly be avoided—you will understand. Her name is bound to be connected with the crime. Of course, she may come back at any moment. I had been so counting on your help."

"I would have given it with pleasure, but I have to go to London immediately, and then abroad on a case of international importance, from which I cannot possibly be released. I will certainly have a word with Boyce about this at the Yard. I suppose

there is no reason beyond the shock of the murder to cause her to go away like this ? "

" None whatever, Mr. Sinclair. But you know she and Kitty Lake were intimate friends, and I have sometimes fancied that she knew more than she had told me about Kitty's affairs."

Sinclair was about to ask another question, but the look on Kenyon's worried face stopped him. Instead, he held out his hand. " I hope you will have some better news shortly. Mind you keep in touch with Scotland Yard. Good-bye."

Sinclair made his way to his own car through the crowded inn yard. Captain Farrar was walking slowly in front of him, deep in thought. He turned as Sinclair approached.

" Are you going off, Mr. Sinclair ? " he asked casually. " Have a cigarette ? "

" I always smoke a pipe," Sinclair replied, ignoring the question. Then, in a hearty manner : " By the way, Captain Farrar, haven't we met before ? I seem to know your face."

Farrar puckered his brows, as if in recollection.

" No," he said slowly, " I don't think I have ever seen you before ; but, then, it is hardly likely, as most of my service was done in India."

" I was in India, too," said Sinclair slowly.

" Oh, really ? " said Farrar. " That is most interesting. We probably have many friends in common. I wish we had time for a yarn."

Sinclair took the other man's hand as if saying good-bye, and, still holding it, asked him one question :

" Did you ever, by any chance, come across

an officer named Captain Fortescue, or possibly Forester ? "

" Never," replied Farrar firmly, an ingenuous look of surprise on his face. But Sinclair felt the hand he was holding give a sudden nervous jump.

## CHAPTER V

## SINCLAIR'S DEPARTURE

On his arrival in London, Sinclair reported to his Chief, Commissioner James Boyce, who was, in fact, waiting impatiently for him in his office at Scotland Yard.

Boyce had prospered in recent years, largely through taking credit for Sinclair's work. His room was quite unlike the usual Government office, which, as a rule, is Spartan in its simplicity—even in the case of Cabinet Ministers.

Boyce was a sybarite. There was a Persian carpet of rare design on the floor, panelled wallpaper on the walls, and rich curtains at the windows. His desk was of carved oak, on which were set a silver inkstand and pen-tray, ivory elephants, and an ebony cigar box. In one corner of the room was a beautiful inlaid cabinet which, as his intimate friends knew, contained a variety of spirituous liquors, unfettered by close-time regulations.

He was large and fat and inclined to baldness, and his manner was that of a sleek and fire-loving tabby.

There was a faint suggestion of scent mingled with the smell of cigar-smoke which revolted Sinclair. Boyce held out a fat hand as Sinclair came in.

"Sorry to fetch you up from your inquest,

Sinclair," he said silkily, "but, as you know, the matter is urgent—in fact, of international importance. You remember the Government of India have asked for your services in connection with the affair of the Rajah of Bhipor."

Sinclair had spent many years in India, in the police force, and had made a great reputation in that country before taking up his appointment at Scotland Yard.

"It's a ticklish business," said Boyce, placing his chubby fingers together. "The whole status of ruling princes is involved. It wants very tactful handling. Have a cigar?"

Sinclair helped himself from the box, to hide the smile he could not repress. He had followed the whole case with the greatest care.

"We'd better go through the details," Boyce continued, leaning back comfortably in his chair. "You will remember that about six months ago an Indian girl of high caste was abducted from her father's house at Bhipor—just the ordinary sort of story; but the father, Ali something or other (I never can remember Indian names), was murdered in the process. That made it rather serious."

Boyce gulped at Sinclair, puffing his cigar, and looking at him with expressionless, fishy eyes.

"Suspicion fell on the young Rajah—who seems a bit of a rip—and there was talk of a Commission, and even of abdication, when our people out there got on the track of two ex-Army officers, one of whom has been a holy terror in India since he was dismissed from the Service. He is a man of good family, first-rate appearance, and all that, but a bad hat—

rotten all through. You may have heard of him—Forester was his name, but he's had several since, and they tell me he's a demon at disguise. He seems to be one of those queer types who commit crimes for the sheer love of the thing—you know what I mean."

Sinclair nodded ; he was enjoying himself.

" The other beauty was also court-martialled, but he seems to have vanished altogether."

" What is supposed to be the motive? " asked Sinclair.

" Well, it is difficult to say. The girl was supposed to be a beauty, for an Indian." Boyce had a supreme contempt for all " niggers," as he would have designated all citizens of the British Empire who were not of the dominant Anglo-Saxon race. He was a great reader of Kipling.

" Either they wanted to do a deal with the Rajah for the girl, acting as his agents, or they had their own purposes—blackmail or robbery. That's what we have to find out.

" You see, if this Rajah fellow has nothing to do with it—and it looks like that at present—then it's fairly simple."

" Then I am to go to India ? " Sinclair was getting tired of Boyce's speculations.

" No. Constantinople."

Sinclair was startled in spite of himself. " Where ? "

" Constantinople. It appears that this Forester has been tracked there, and taken the girl with him. All trace has since been lost."

" And the other ? "

" His whereabouts are not known ; but the main

thing is to get hold of the girl and make her tell the whole story. She may even be in league with them. See Stevens, the head of our secret police in Constantinople, and find out all you can. You will, of course, report to me as well as keeping in touch with the Indian authorities. Great secrecy must be maintained, to avoid scandal."

"You want me to go at once?"

"The Viceroy is most anxious, and the Home Secretary has agreed. You can leave that wretched case at Littleworth; you are only involved in it by accident, and Curtis—or whatever his name is—can carry on. We can send a man to help him if they call us in; no doubt they will get the man soon. I've been reading the account of the inquest in the evening papers. There seemed to be plenty of clues."

"I should like to have gone on with it myself," said Sinclair thoughtfully.

"By the way, Sinclair, I see you are reported in the evidence as saying that you knew the murderer. That's a mistake of the reporter, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Sinclair, "as you say, it's a mistake; I never said I knew who was the murderer."

"Well, well, off you go. Draw what money you want for expenses, and take this special pass from the Foreign Office. It will get you through with less bother. Let me know how you get on."

A sudden premonition of evil came to Sinclair. He felt inclined to refuse the job, but conquered the momentary feeling of uneasiness.

"Would you do me a favour, sir?" he asked, turning to Boyce at the door. "If any arrest is made in the Littleworth case, will you send me a cable?"

"Certainly." Boyce was surprised. "You seem very interested in it?"

"So much so that, if an arrest is made, I shall come back at once."

Boyce opened wide his gooseberry eyes.

"You are a dark horse, Sinclair. I believe you know more than you care to say."

"I don't know more, but perhaps I have seen more, which is not the same thing."

He went to his own rooms, where his assistant was waiting. "I'm off to Constantinople," he said, with as little emphasis as if he had said he was going to Tooting. "I shall be away some time. Has anything special come in?"

"No, sir; only a few unimportant matters. Hodgeson has been arrested for the Gloucester murder."

"Ah, I thought so; but they nearly lost him."

"Yes, he was taken on the boat at Liverpool."

"Anything else?"

"I suppose you know, sir, that Mr. Robert Kenyon has reported to us that his wife has disappeared from his London house? He appears very anxious about it, and has asked for our help."

"Mr. Kenyon told me so. What are you doing about it?"

"Well, we thought it was just the effects of the murder—that she had probably got a horror of London, and gone to some friends. But Mr. Kenyon seems so distracted about it, we are inclined to take a more serious view."

"You mean that she may have committed suicide?"

"It may be so."

"Let's hope not. But there is another possibility. Anyway, you must watch this carefully. Get one of our best men on to it. It may be necessary to broadcast a public appeal, but Mr. Kenyon wishes to avoid that if possible."

"You think it serious, then, sir?"

"I think it may have serious consequences."

As a bachelor, Sinclair had no home ties, and his preparations for departure were always made in advance for any emergency.

That evening he set out on his long journey, a feeling of uneasiness on his mind which he could not shake off. Had he known the tremendous consequences of that journey, he might have been tempted to turn back, in spite of Boyce and the Home Secretary himself.

## CHAPTER VI

## THE MEETING ON THE TRAIN

Sinclair read the evening papers on his way to Paris, and saw that the coroner's jury had brought in a verdict of murder against some person or persons unknown in the Littleworth case. There were startling headlines about the revelations made at the inquest, and his own statement was commented upon, with the remark : " A detective of the great experience of Superintendent Sinclair would never have made such a statement without good grounds, and we shall expect an early arrest which may surprise the public."

He smiled grimly as he read the paragraph. " Will they ? " he muttered to himself.

Sinclair had booked a sleeping-berth in the Orient Express—probably the most luxurious train in the world. After an excellent dinner, he made his way to the observation-car and stretched himself comfortably in an armchair, smoking a cigar of fine quality. He set himself to examine documents which he had brought with him.

Sinclair seldom read books, for his " papers " kept him occupied, and if only his fellow-travellers could have looked into these, they would have dropped their stories of fiction for these bizarre tales of crime in real life.

The rhythmic throb of the engine and the smooth motion of the car, after a long and tiring day, made him sleepy, and, when he found that his cigar had dropped from his hand the second time, he felt that it would be better to turn in.

In his strenuous and athletic life, Sinclair seldom had time for the small luxuries with which most men content their minds in moments of relaxation. He appreciated all the more the comforts of this journey, and as by a stroke of luck he had a sleeping-berth to himself, he was soon fast asleep.

But long practice and continual exposure to danger had given Sinclair an extraordinary power of waking in an instant at the least disturbance.

In the early hours of the morning he found himself suddenly wide awake, and listening to a sound from the next compartment. It was that of a man restlessly padding backwards and forwards in the confined space of the sleeping-berth. Four quick steps, a pause, then four back again, continually repeated, and a series of muttered curses. The sound went on without intermission, and then came a noise between a gasp and a sob, as of someone labouring under strong emotion.

Here was a soul in trouble. All of a sudden the noise stopped, and Sinclair leaped from his berth. He knew from long experience how often such fits have a tragic ending—a shot, or perhaps a razor.

He counted not a whit for snubs ; he considered himself a public guardian. Putting on a dressing-gown, he cautiously made his way into the corridor and knocked at the door.

" Who's there ? " asked a voice in English.

"Can I speak to you?" Sinclair replied in a soothing voice.

"What do you want?"

"Open the door, and I'll tell you."

There was silence for a moment, then a shuffling sound, and the lock turned.

"Come in, then," said the unknown.

Sinclair entered and looked at the man, who had jumped back into his berth and was half hidden among the bed-clothes.

"All alone?" he asked in a cheerful tone, looking round.

"There is a Frenchman sleeping above," the man replied, "but he is playing cards or something. What is it you want?"

Sinclair took stock of the man; he was clean-shaven and about thirty years old. Sinclair judged him a business man in some trouble, probably financial—he had seen many such cases. He never believed in beating about the bush.

"I heard you tramping up and down your cubby-hole," he said with a smile. "You seemed rather worried about something, so I thought I would come and have a talk. I know it's rather cheek on my part, but sometimes one likes to confide in a fellow-countryman when one is abroad."

The strained, drawn look about the other man's face and a certain wildness in his eyes told Sinclair that he had been wise in coming. Without waiting for a reply, he seated himself on the edge of the berth. The other man eyed him suspiciously.

"I don't know who you are," he said, "but I seem to recognise your face."

"My name is Sinclair—Superintendent Sinclair, of Scotland Yard."

"Scotland Yard!" the man gasped. "You are not following me?"

"Good heavens, no," said Sinclair, with a hearty laugh. "Don't tell me anything about yourself if you would rather not, but if there's anything in which I can help, treat me as a friend."

"My name is Barratt," said the other slowly. "Arthur Barratt. I am a partner in a City firm, of Brick Street."

Sinclair produced a large flask he always carried for emergencies, and offered it to the other.

"Thank you," said Barratt, taking a long pull. "That's better. . . . I've had a rotten time lately."

Sinclair waited, but Barratt remained silent.

"Would you care to tell me about it? Though there is no need to, if you would rather not." He somehow felt he would like to hear the man's story.

Barratt seemed to take a resolution.

"Well, I will; although I've never met you, of course I've heard a great deal about you. You will regard this as confidential?"

"Certainly," replied Sinclair.

The confidential communications which lay stored up in Sinclair's brain would have caused many a sensation had they been revealed. It was one of his peculiar characteristics that he always kept inviolate any statement made to him in confidence—an attitude of mind which would have shocked many of his colleagues at the Yard.

Barratt took another pull at the flask, and the colour came back to his face.

"I've run away," he said suddenly.

"Yes?"

"You don't ask why?"

"Not in the least, but I can hazard a guess. I have heard your name mentioned not so very long ago in connection with the Lake family."

Sinclair shot a keen glance at his man.

"My God, yes; Madeline Lake is my fiancée."

"And you are here on the Orient Express," Sinclair said with quiet emphasis.

Barratt moved restlessly.

"You know all about the murder; I know you do. I read about the inquest," he said.

"Is it in connection with the murder that you are here?" asked Sinclair.

"Yes. I will tell you everything. There's nothing to hide. I was in Paris on duty, buying for my firm—I very often have to go abroad suddenly—when the news came. It completely bowled me over. I am engaged to Madeline, as I told you, and I don't suppose anyone in the world could be more devoted to his lady. . . . I don't know what the trouble is . . . perhaps the psychologist could give the explanation—there must be a dual personality in most men. . . . Anyway, month by month I found myself getting more and more fond of Kitty. I can't explain it—you may understand; perhaps it's because they were twins. My love for Madeline hasn't altered, and I have genuinely fought against the other with all my strength, and hoped I had got it under. You see, if they had not been sisters it would not have been so difficult, but, as they lived together, I was brought in daily touch with her. If I stayed

away to fight it out, Madeline was in tears when I went again, and thought I'd forsaken her. Then Kitty, of course, used to kiss me almost as a brother, and I had the greatest difficulty not to take her in my arms. Some nights Mrs. Lake would ask me to go to the theatre and meet her, and I couldn't refuse, even if I could have mastered the temptation; and I had her sitting by me in the car, quite natural and child-like. She would link her arm in mine, and tell me all about her work and her little triumphs."

His voice broke, and Sinclair waited in silence.

"I don't suppose any of the three suspected anything," he went on drearily, "unless perhaps Madeline, for I caught her looking at me in a peculiar manner sometimes when I was talking to Kitty, but she was too loyal to doubt me for a moment."

"And Kitty never suspected? Women are sharp, you know, where love is concerned," said Sinclair shrewdly.

"I am sure of it."

Sinclair's face had grown grave.

"You have read the account of the inquest, Barratt?"

Barratt buried his face in his hands. "It's too awful," he said.

"Can you account for it in any way?"

"What do you mean?"

"I don't want to go into particulars, but you read——"

A look of amazement came to Barratt, followed swiftly by one of fury.

"You cad! You unspeakable cad! You dare to suggest——" He leapt from the berth.

"Steady," said Sinclair, pushing him back firmly. Barratt's eyes were blazing; then he suddenly collapsed.

"You believe such a vile thing about me? God, it's awful!"

"I don't say I believe it, but I had to ask you, after what you told me. I know human nature."

"It is this frightful thing which is driving me mad. I felt to-night that if I went back I should betray myself to Madeline and her mother. I feel an absolute swine for having played the traitor in thought, though, thank God, I never breathed a word to Kitty. I can't get over it; it haunts me night and day."

Sinclair looked critically at him. He judged him on the verge of a break-up—possibly suicide.

"Pull yourself together, man, and don't behave like a weak woman. If what you've told me is true—and I believe you—you have nothing to reproach yourself with. One cannot help one's feelings; but now you are behaving like a coward. You've two duties, and you've got to face them. You've got to go back and look after these two women in their trouble, for heaven knows they need your help. And you must help bring the criminal to justice. Why, whatever must they be thinking of your desertion of them at this time?"

"I've been a fool, but I was all alone with my thoughts," said Barratt. There was resolution in his voice. "You are quite right, but I must have a breathing-space to pull myself together."

" There is one other thing you don't seem to have realised. Don't you see that suspicion may have fallen upon you, if you disappear in this way ? "

" But I was on my way to Paris when the murder took place."

" Quite so, and that is why you should go back and explain matters," said Sinclair dryly.

" I will tell you what I'll do," said Barratt. " I'll cable my firm that I have to go to Vienna ; that will be quite in order, and I can return from there, and I'll let Mrs. Lake know that I am coming back."

" Very good, and I'll tell Scotland Yard that you are with me, in case of inquiries. Now that is settled, tell me, is there anyone you know of at all likely to have been friendly with Kitty Lake ? "

" No one at all that I know of. I saw so much of her ; she had little opportunity of meeting other men, considering what a success she was, and she always seemed so glad when I met her at the theatre. If she had any secret affair she would have preferred me not to come there at all."

" George Anthony was acting with her, wasn't he ? " said Sinclair musingly.

" Impossible. I know George well."

" Yes, so you may ; but there is no such thing as impossible."

" The very suggestion is an insult."

Sinclair glanced keenly at him.

" Very good ; then we have got that settled. Write to Mrs. Lake and Miss Madeline Lake letters of sympathy. Say you have been so upset that you couldn't write before, and that you are coming back to look after them. You'd better write to your firm

and tell them you want a holiday when you get back. Yes, you may want it badly. Just follow my advice in this matter—and one thing more : keep me informed of events. Go to my secretary if you want to write to me. I'll give you a note for him ; it will get you through much quicker that way."

" Certainly I'll follow your advice—you have been a good friend to me this night—though I don't understand."

" Never mind ; do as I ask. And now to bed. I'll get you a sleeping-draught. I always carry my medicine-chest with me."

Sinclair waited until he had seen Barratt safely asleep, and then returned to his berth. In the passage he passed Barratt's French companion, who had been having a night of it with some chance companions, and cautioned him not to disturb the sleeping man. In the dim light of the corridor he noticed that he was a clean-shaven man with sleek black hair and a swarthy complexion suggestive of the southerner.

Sinclair lay awake pondering over the new complication.

" Poor devil," he said to himself. " He's in for a rough time when he gets back."

The Orient Express passes through Bavaria and the romantic country of Southern Germany to the Austrian border.

As Sinclair took his seat in the observation-car the following morning, he allowed his mind to stray from the dark problems which filled so much of his life to the fairy-like beauty of the scenery through which they were passing. Those who only knew him

as a stern hunter-down of criminals, implacable and fearless, little guessed that much of his success was due to a lively imagination and a keen sense of the romantic, which often led him to a right solution when mere judgment and deduction had reached a dead end.

He had passed on this way in the dead of winter, and seen the little villages, with roofs covered with snow, clustered round the churches which capped the hills, the very embodiment of Christmas legend, while the frozen branches of the bare trees made a lacework of enchantment. But now it was mid-summer, and these same villages were bathed in greenery, and the vales were dotted with flowers. They mounted up on their little hills, the red roofs seeming to touch each other in friendly intercourse, and the narrow, winding streets between. The quaintly dressed peasants went about their duties as though the whole picture had been arranged for the delight of the passing traveller.

The panorama opened out; rapid-flowing streams, deep glens, and dim mountains passed them in a parade of beauty, until the train, with a jarring of brakes, swept into the station of Passau, on the frontier, standing on an island round which the forked river swirled.

Sinclair's thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of Barratt. He looked a very different person now from the haunted man of the night before, and was the cool, collected business man, rather ashamed of his former emotion. Sinclair put him at his ease at once.

"We stay here about an hour," he said. "Let's Fo

have a look at the town ; it's really worth seeing. We can send our messages from here—I know the people pretty well—and have a bit of lunch at a place I've been to before."

"Delighted," said Barratt, his face clearing. "By the way, Sinclair," he said suddenly, "that Frenchman who was sleeping in the berth above mine—we've been having a talk this morning. A most interesting man—seems to have travelled all over the world. He seemed devilish interested in you."

"I spoke to him last night," said Sinclair. "Perhaps I shall see him again."

## CHAPTER VII

## BARRATT'S RETURN

Mrs. Lake and her daughter received the news of Barratt's safety with mixed feelings—relief that nothing serious had happened to him linked with a feeling of soreness that he had not come to them at once. Mrs. Lake was deeply hurt. "I think it was very unkind of him not to have come, dear," she said, "though I don't want to hurt your feelings. He knew we had no male relation, and at such a time he should have put everything on one side for your sake as well as for the friendship he had for poor Kitty."

"Don't, mother, please," said Madeline crossly.

Her mother looked at her anxiously. Since the inquest she seemed a changed being. Instead of the strong help her mother had expected, she had become irritable, with lapses of silence. She would sit for hours gazing into vacancy. Tears came easily, though she was not given to crying. She seemed restless, and unable to concentrate on anything. It was as though she were waiting for some event to happen.

On the day of the arrival of Barratt's letter, George Anthony came down to see them. He had been assiduous in his attention—kind and thoughtful and always careful to avoid any mention of the shadow

which brooded over them, hoping that time would heal the wound.

Madeline saw him coming, and went up the road to meet him.

" This sea air is good after the heat of London. I hope it is doing you both good," he said.

" We've heard from Arthur," said Madeline quite suddenly. " He is on his way home from Vienna, where he has been on business."

Anthony looked at her, astonished at the lifeless tone of her voice.

" But this is good news," he said. " I am glad he is coming. But where on earth has he been to ? "

She did not meet his mood. " He says that he has had work to do abroad, and also that he was so upset that he couldn't come." There was a bitter note in her voice ; the old gay manner had completely gone, and the dark rings round her eyes denoted danger. Anthony glanced at her apprehensively.

" Well, as long as he comes along now it will be all right," he said, though his heart misgave him. He had that peculiarly sensitive temperament which responds to its surroundings. " Laugh and I laugh, cry and I must cry," was the burden of his soul.

They walked in silence towards the bungalow, a cool breeze from the Downs blowing on her golden hair, for she had taken off her hat.

At last she said, " Is there any news ? "

He started glibly enough : " Yes, there is a rumour of another big strike ; this time it's——"

She stopped dead, and turned to him. " It's no good, George. You are a darling, and you are trying

to lighten this sorrow for us, but you know what I mean. Is there any news about Kitty's death—any clearing up of the mystery ? "

A bleak look came to his face. " None at present, I fear. Mr. Kenyon would have come down with me, but he is worried about Moira. He has searched everywhere for her."

" It's dreadful. What can have happened to her ? "

" He is trying to keep it private as long as he can, but he will have to make a general appeal to the public for help ; there is no other course."

" And you still have no idea who the man was who betrayed my sister ? "

Anthony was distressed. " Let's try as far as we can to forget that. You know, it may have nothing to do with the murder ; and, again, Kitty may have married secretly, for all we know. Such things have happened."

" Then why does not the man come forward ? " she cried passionately.

" Come, let's see your mother." And they walked on in silence.

They had tea in the little verandah facing the sea, which sparkled beneath them. Happy bathers were splashing in the water, and the merry shouts of children at play came faintly to them with almost a jarring note, as though others had no right to be happy.

" This is a charming spot," said Anthony, trying to lift the gloom which hung over them.

" How poor Kitty would have loved it," said Mrs. Lake, and burst into tears.

George looked helplessly at Madeline, who spoke sharply.

"Mother, if you are always giving way like this, George won't care to come any more. It's no good grieving all day for Kitty." The outburst was so unusual for Madeline that her mother was shocked into sudden anger, and the tears disappeared.

"Madeline, how can you talk like that?" she began, but suddenly stopped to listen.

There was a sound of approaching footsteps crunching on the shingles, and Arthur came round the corner, carrying a bag. He was hot with walking and rather shamefaced, but came forward with a smile. "Hullo, I've found you at last."

He went to Mrs. Lake and took her hand, then, turning to Madeline, he would have kissed her, but something in her face and the proud carriage of her head deterred him. She was looking intently at him, and her face was very white. He drew back and greeted Anthony in some confusion. He did not want a scene before the others, and imagined her conduct was due to his desertion of them.

Anthony relieved the situation.

"Well, you are here at last," he said, his acting experience giving him a power of control which was lacking in the others. "We'd almost given you up for lost, and were going to invoke the aid of the wireless to locate you. Let's hear all about it."

"There's nothing much to tell," said Barratt sulkily. "I went to Paris on business, and read about this terrible affair. I was so completely knocked out that I hardly knew what I was doing."

"I can quite believe that," said Madeline, in a voice charged with emotion. Her mother looked at her in surprise.

"When did you go?" Anthony asked at random.

"As a matter of fact, I crossed the evening on which the tragedy took place, and read of it first in the Paris papers. Of course, I see now that I should have come back at once. I am very sorry."

"I had hoped you would have come," said Mrs. Lake in gentle reproof. "But for Mr. Kenyon and George we should have been quite alone."

"I know; it was rotten of me, but really it was not through want of sympathy. When I arrived I took some time to find you, as I didn't know you had left London," he ended lamely.

There was one of those silences where everyone wishes to say something and no one knows quite what to say.

Anthony rose and said, "Come on, Mrs. Lake; we will have a stroll on the beach. I expect Arthur and Madeline would like to have a talk."

Madeline shuddered, but said nothing; Mrs. Lake welcomed the chance. She hated quarrels, but thought with Anthony that a good row between these two would clear the atmosphere.

Madeline waited until the others were out of earshot, and then faced Arthur. He had never seen such a look of fury on any woman's face.

"You cur! You loathsome cur! So this is what you have been doing! No, don't speak until I have done, or I'll strike you. Do you think I was blind all this time? I watched you, and saw how you were worming yourself into Kitty's affections. I hoped

that you would have been man enough to pull yourself together—to break away, or come and tell me straight it was Kitty you loved, not me. Instead of this, you went on pretending you cared for me, and this—this is the result."

She tore her engagement ring from her finger and flung it on the ground.

"Take it ! It poisons my hand. And go, go at once, and if you find forgiveness elsewhere, try and get it ; you'll have none from me."

She saw a face as furious as her own as with clenched fists he advanced on her.

"You dare to make this foul accusation ! If only you were a man I would box your ears."

"I shouldn't let that stop me if I were you," she answered, with a sneer of utter contempt.

He mastered himself with difficulty.

"Madeline, do you seriously accuse me of murdering Kitty ? "

"You may have done, for all I know, but that would be, in my judgment, a lesser crime ; you know quite well what I mean."

He was staggered. "You must be mad, absolutely mad ! I give you my solemn word of honour that your accusation is utterly false, and a vile thing even to think of."

Her mood changed.

"Oh, if I could think so, if I could be convinced, I would go down on the floor and grovel at your feet, asking for forgiveness. But it is impossible. I have seen you together ; call me a spy if you like—I was fighting for my love at the time. I saw the way she looked at you. A woman can tell."

" You mean your jealousy imagined things."

" Do you mean to tell me you didn't love her? If you have a spark of manhood in you, you will tell the truth."

" God forgive me, I did," he said, and hung his head.

" God forgive you ! " she cried in scorn. " When a man has done some unusually disgusting crime, he always invokes the name of God, as though He is on the side of seducers."

" Madeline, you lie ! " he shouted in impotent fury. " Will nothing convince you ? I have told you the truth. I did love her, but it made no difference to my love for you, and I swear that never by word or action did I show her my feelings for her."

" How loathsome, how utterly vile ! Go ! Your very presence poisons the air. I don't want to see you again as long as I live. Get out, or I shall shriek."

She was almost hysterical, and he picked up his bag and turned to the path.

" Some day you will be sorry, and come to me. Till then I will get out of your life altogether."

He was gone, and Madeline placed her heel on the ring and ground it among the pebbles, and then fell on the ground in a blind fit of weeping.

And so they found her, and her mother gently raised her to a chair and sat beside her.

" What has happened, my darling ? And where is Arthur ? "

Madeline controlled herself with an effort and spoke calmly.

" Mother, if you love me, never speak to me again

of that man ; do not refer to him. He has gone—for ever."

Anthony started, and an expression of wonder came to his face.

The sadness of despair had indeed come to this house.

## CHAPTER VIII

## INVESTIGATIONS

Sergeant Curtis felt the responsibility of his task keenly. It was a big order for him to undertake—the unravelling of the "Littleworth Mystery," as it had come to be called.

He was in daily dread of the intervention of Scotland Yard and the taking of the matter out of his hands. He looked up from his desk in his office at Ketworth with surprise as the tall figure of Robert Kenyon entered with a police constable.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he said, springing to his feet.

"You are in charge of the Littleworth case, I believe?" Kenyon asked.

"That is so."

"I am anxious to go to my cottage to fetch some papers which I left there, but, as it is in the hands of the police, I thought it was better to come and see you. I have my car outside, and if you can spare the time we will run over."

"I will get the keys and come at once," said Curtis.

In a few minutes they were running up the steep hill to the woods above Littleworth, among which lay the ill-omened cottage. There was a little church of red brick almost completely hidden in the woods,

with a school close by, where children from the scattered cottages of the neighbourhood assembled in the mornings and vanished in the evenings. There were a few cottages dotted about the hillside, but no other signs of life.

Kenyon's cottage was already showing signs of decay. The grass was growing untended, and weeds were making their appearance. The blinds were drawn, and the superstition of Sussex had not been long in weaving tales of weeping figures seen at night's close and wailings heard from the dismal cottage.

No farm labourer would go near it at night except from necessity, and then he would hurry past in fear.

The two men stood at the gate and looked down the pathway.

"It is strange," said Curtis, "what a few days' neglect will accomplish. The place looks as though it had been unoccupied for months."

"I shall never live there again," said Kenyon.

"I suppose you will sell it?" said the other.

"No, I shall leave it just as it is."

Curtis laughed. "You will either ruin the neighbourhood or make it famous if you do. We shall have people coming from all parts of England, and even from America, to see it, as though it were an historic building."

When the door was opened, the interior of the living-room looked ghostly in the half-light. A creak of a chair made both men start, as though the poor spook had risen at the intrusion. Curtis pulled back a blind, but the daylight only made the desolation appear more eerie.

Kenyon crossed the room and pushed open the door into his study, which gave a moaning sound as he touched it. Curtis tried to shake off the impression of the place, and, with an impatient gesture, he threw the windows open and let in the daylight from outside, but his forehead was wet. He spoke in a whisper.

" I have never felt the presence of living evil like this before. There must be some aura or ectoplasm, or whatever it's called, about the spot where a murder has taken place."

" I am glad you said that," Kenyon replied, " for I felt the same feeling myself, but didn't like to say so, it sounds so foolish."

Kenyon went to his desk and pulled open one drawer after another, until he laid his hands on a bundle of papers. " This is what I was looking for," he said. " It is the first draft of my next play, but I was so utterly sick of the whole thing that I hadn't troubled to take it away with me." He closed the desk and faced round. "What have you done up till now ; have you made any discoveries ? "

" Well, there are certain very definite clues, but I would like to know what Sinclair meant by his strange statement at the inquest. Was it merely ' swank,' or had he some ideas ? "

" A man of his standing would not be guilty of so stupid a statement if he did not know something, but he must have had very strong motives for not disclosing what he knew."

" Well, since he has gone I have had to work this thing out without his help. First, there is the question of footmarks. We took very careful tracings of these,

but up till now we cannot find any boot to fit them."

"That means nothing. A man contemplating such a crime would naturally wear somebody else's boots, and then get rid of them. What about the glove?"

"We have not been able to trace it up till now, and ordinary gloves of that common type are hard to trace."

"Fingerprints?"

"There are none. It is quite evident that the murderer was wearing one glove, if not two."

"Have you seen Mrs. Lake and her daughter since the inquest?"

"No, but they came here the day after the murder, and could tell me nothing."

"And you have not been able to find out whether there was any man—what shall we say—making love to the girl?"

"No, that is as great a mystery as the crime itself, and may have nothing to do with it."

"Quite. We may be assuming that the man who had betrayed her was necessarily the murderer, whereas he may have been a separate person. For example, there may have been just a common burglar with homicidal tendencies who saw an open window, and, when detected, killed the girl in a moment of panic."

"There is something deeper than that in it—there is the letter," said Curtis.

Kenyon looked up. "Did you ever get a satisfactory explanation as to what Mr. Anthony was doing in the neighbourhood?" he asked.

"I am afraid we shall not get much there. His

explanation is quite straightforward, and he came at once with Captain Farrar to this cottage."

"I am glad of that. I should not like to think that George had anything to do with such a dastardly crime, but of course we cannot eliminate possibilities." Kenyon rose to his feet. "Well, I think we had better be off. I don't like the atmosphere of this place much." Then suddenly he gripped the other's arm tightly. "What was that?" he said.

"What do you mean?" asked Curtis, startled in spite of himself.

"I heard something in the house behind me. It sounded like a moan."

Curtis looked at his companion almost in pity, thinking that his nerves were playing him a trick. "I heard nothing——" he began, but a low moaning sound belied his words, and, in spite of himself, the hair rose stiffly on his head.

Kenyon was white, but he turned and went boldly through the door. Curtis waited on pins and needles, but the sound was not repeated. In a moment Kenyon was back.

"I found the cause of that noise," he said.

"Something silly, I suppose—a cat or a dog?" said Curtis, with a forced laugh.

"No, a woman. Guess who it is."

"Don't ask me riddles, sir. Who was it?" said Curtis impatiently.

"The maid-of-all-work. I don't even know what her name is. She had a key of the kitchen, and seems half-witted. She is moaning over the empty stove, which she is trying to light without matches. Come and talk to her. You may get some sense out of her."

They went together through the dining-room to the little kitchen at the back, where a country girl was rocking herself to and fro on a stool.

"What are you doing here?" asked Curtis sharply.

"Oh, the poor dead, the poor dear dead. I must get a cup of tea for her; she will be here soon."

"Look here, my girl," said Curtis, taking her by the shoulder, "stop this nonsense and tell me why you're here."

The girl looked up. "To get Miss Kitty's tea. She always comes at this time."

In spite of himself, Curtis shuddered. "Stop talking rubbish. Poor Miss Lake is dead. You've no right to be here at all. Now, get off like a sensible girl, and don't come here any more."

"Wait a moment," said Kenyon, and, turning to the girl, he said, "Why do you come here?"

"The gentleman give me a note, sir, and I lost it."

"What gentleman?"

"I don't know, sir. He give me a note and a half-crown, and she asks for it."

"Who asks for it?"

"Miss Kitty, every time I give her her tea." And the girl turned again to the fire.

Curtis jerked her to her feet. "Now look here, my girl, what do you mean by a note? When did you get it, and where?"

But there was no getting any sense out of the poor creature; she kept repeating the same thing. Between them they got her away, after wheedling the key of the kitchen from her. She went off quietly

enough, and disappeared into the woods to her mother's cottage.

"What do you make of that?" asked Curtis.

"The poor soul is unhinged by the murder. She strikes me as being a half-wit."

"But does the reference to the note mean anything?"

"It may be of the greatest importance. I should follow it up if I were you."

Kenyon looked at his watch. "I say," he said, "it's getting late. I'll run you down to the 'Ivy Bush' at Littleworth and we'll have some lunch there."

"Thank you, sir," said Curtis. "I'll lock the place up."

The old inn was bathed in sunlight when their car drew up at the door. Aged men sat on a bench outside, having a last drink before the time-limit, and a mass of green spread up the village street.

It was a clean vision of country life, where uneventful lives were spent in toil and simple pleasures till the village churchyard claimed each in a common fraternity, squire and labourer, scholar and rustic.

Little affairs—the local bowling club, and a billiard match between the village champion and a celebrity from Poolborough, with the occasional advent of a soldier or sailor on leave, full of tales of foreign parts—filled their daily lives.

The murder had provided food for gossip for many a day, and the local postman, a Socialist, was firm in his belief that the evils of high life were responsible for this terrible crime.

They went into the smoking-room and rang the

bell, and the landlord's daughter, Mary, answered their call.

"Can you give us anything to eat?" asked Kenyon. "We're starving."

"I am afraid you are rather late, sir. The dinner is off, but I will see what I can do."

"We don't want a proper meal; anything will do."

Soon they were sitting before a huge joint of cold beef, while the girl hovered in the background. Curtis saw a chance for conversation.

"You have had a dreadful murder down here, haven't you?" he asked.

The girl was all attention at once, and proceeded to give them details, with embellishments.

"They do say that the cottage is haunted," she said, "and no wonder, with the poor soul crying for vengeance, as my mother says."

"That's all rubbish, of course," said Curtis, sipping his cup of coffee. "But tell me; you were here at the time; what happened at the inquest?"

Another long recital was given volubly, to which they listened with patience.

"And that was all?" asked Kenyon, half humorously.

"Yes, sir, but do you know any of these gentlemen?"

"Oh, yes," replied Kenyon guardedly. "Why do you ask?"

"Did you know Mr. Anthony, the same as stayed here?"

"Very well."

"Oh, then, sir, you could tell me where he lives?

Because I've got something of his he might want. I found it in his room after he'd gone."

" What was that ? "

" Only an old glove. But he might have the other, and, after all, gloves is gloves, and none too cheap nowadays."

" Let's have a look at it," said Kenyon, exchanging a glance with Curtis.

The girl bounced out of the room, and returned with an old chamois leather glove.

The two men felt a strange feeling of excitement when they saw that it was a right-hand glove.

" I will return it to him," said Kenyon, slipping a coin into the girl's hand.

## CHAPTER IX

## MR. ANTHONY'S FLAT

"Is Mr. Anthony at home?"

"No, sir, but I expect him at any moment."

Curtis paused, as though in doubt. "I think I will wait for him," he said, but the man did not move.

"You will excuse me asking you, sir, but are you a friend of his?"

"Why, certainly," said Curtis boisterously. "I've been wanting to see him for ages—just returned from abroad."

The man's face cleared. "I beg your pardon, sir, but I thought maybe you were one of those Press people. They are always trying to interview Mr. Anthony, and he doesn't like it."

He spoke as though he were mentioning some pestiferous beetle which infested the house.

"Oh, dear me, no," said Curtis, entering the hall. "I am nothing to do with the Press." He handed his hat and stick to the man, and entered the sitting-room.

Anthony lived in a bachelor flat which had been carved out of an eighteenth-century house in an old square which had been passed by the whirl of change. The rooms were lofty and large, and the ceilings and fireplaces ornate with decorations,

sobered by age but with all the vulgarity of the period in which the house was built. There was just a sitting-room and bedroom and bathroom, with quarters for the man. Anthony would have no woman about his place, and took his meals at one of his clubs.

The room in which Curtis found himself was comfortably but not luxuriously furnished. There were books in plenty, and a fine old desk and sideboard, and large easy-chairs for rest. Curtis took in every detail rapidly. He had chosen his time with deliberation. He knew that Anthony was engaged for the evening, which he had taken the trouble to ascertain, and that the coast was clear for his investigations.

The man followed him into the room, as though loth to leave him alone. "Can I get you anything, sir?" he asked. "Mr. Anthony keeps his cigarettes in that box, and there is whisky in the decanter. I am sure he would wish you to make yourself at home."

"Nothing, thank you, except—I suppose you haven't got an evening paper?"

"I can easily get you one at the corner, sir," said the man.

"Thank you," said Curtis, handing him a half-crown.

The moment the door was shut Curtis sprang to his feet, and went to another door which was slightly ajar and cautiously entered the bedroom. It was furnished with Spartan simplicity, but it was not at the furniture he looked, but at a neat row of boots and shoes under the dressing-table. He picked one

up quickly and saw the maker's name—a well-known firm in Glasshouse Street.

Taking a piece of paper from his pocket, he placed one boot on it and then another, and gave a smile of satisfaction as he saw how each fitted the paper. Then he tried the left boots, with the same result. Carefully replacing the boots, he slipped into the sitting-room again as the man returned with the paper.

"Thank you," he said. "You can keep the change."

But the man showed no inclination to leave him alone.

"I suppose Mr. Anthony is pretty well tied in London nowadays, isn't he?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, he's acting again now; but he was away in the country for some time. He was rather lucky to slip into a principal part through the illness of the man who was taking it."

"But I should have thought, with his reputation, he would not have been out of work?"

"No, sir, all the managers are after him," said the man proudly, "but he was reserving himself for the principal part in Mr. Kenyon's new play. But perhaps you have not heard, sir, of the dreadful murder, as you have been abroad?"

"I read something about it in the paper," said Curtis casually.

"It upset my master terribly, as of course he and the young lady were great friends."

"Has she ever been here—to this flat?"

"Oh, no, sir; Mr. Anthony would never have any woman inside the place," said the man, with a

sniff of contempt. " But I know he used often to take her out to dinner."

Curtis was inspecting the room during this conversation, looking for any signs of a typewriter. A small table in the corner, on which was something in a case, caught his eye. There seemed no chance of the man going, so he made a bold move.

" I don't think it's much use my waiting any longer," he said. " I'll just leave him a note."

" Certainly," said the man, with a note of relief in his voice. He had no great trust in strangers. " You will find writing-paper and envelopes on the desk" ; and he turned and left the room.

Curtis darted across to the table and lifted the top. As he had expected, a typewriter was beneath. Seizing a piece of paper from the writing-desk, he quickly typed out the entire alphabet, and took several samples of the paper neatly set out in pigeonholes. Scribbling a note with an indecipherable signature, he rang the bell.

" Will you give this to Mr. Anthony when he comes in ? " he said to the man, who handed him his stick and hat.

As he passed through the little hall he noticed a bag of golf-clubs standing in the rack. A sudden thought struck him, and he picked out the driver as though interested. It was a left-handed club, and a moment's inspection showed him that all the clubs in the bag were also left-handed.

" Mr. Anthony is a great golfer now, I suppose ? " he said.

" Yes, sir, he's very keen on the game, and always

takes me to caddie for him on Sundays," said the servant.

"It is rather an advantage being left-handed, I always think; perhaps not so much at golf, but certainly at other games."

"Yes, sir, but Mr. Anthony found it awkward in some ways, and has cured himself with the use of a knife and fork, as he said it made him look ridiculous."

Curtis left the flat with a feeling of guilt. He realised, to his disgust, that he was acquiring quite a talent for lying in his detective work, and now he had added burglary to his other talents. To salve his conscience, he told himself he was merely acting a part in the discharge of his duty.

On the morrow he paid a visit to the bootmaker. "I come from Mr. George Anthony," he said to the worthy man, who came forward to serve him. "He was not quite satisfied with the last pair of boots you made him, and wants to know whether perhaps the size of his foot has changed. I have a tracing here of each boot; would you mind checking it?"

The man was all attention, for Anthony was a good customer, and very particular with his footwear.

"Certainly," he said, "but perhaps Mr. Anthony would care for a representative to call and remeasure?" He fetched the old diagrams, and they fitted exactly. "I don't think there's much wrong there," he said, in a slightly aggrieved tone, "unless, of course, it is the uppers that are not fitting."

"I will tell him," said Curtis. "I expect it is only some temporary inconvenience, but you know how particular these actors are."

Curtis went straight to Scotland Yard with the information he had obtained, and asked to see Mr. James Boyce. Soon he was ushered into the presence of the great man.

"You wanted to see me about the Littleworth case?"

"Yes, sir. I would have asked for Superintendent Sinclair, but I understand that he has gone abroad."

"You have something to tell me?" asked Boyce eagerly. He was always delighted to pick other men's brains.

"I have information of considerable importance," said Curtis. "First, sir, I want you to look at this letter, which, you will remember from the evidence, we found in the room where the murder was committed. It is in type."

Boyce examined the document with an air of profound wisdom.

"And here, sir, I have the alphabet typed out. Would it be possible to ascertain whether these are both done by the same machine?"

Boyce touched the bell on his desk, and said to the clerk who appeared in answer, "Send Mr. Thomas, the typewriting expert, to me."

"Very good, sir," said the man, and withdrew.

"These tracings," continued Curtis, "were taken by Mr. Sinclair and myself from the footmarks of the murderer, and they agree exactly with the tracings of the boots of Mr. George Anthony."

Boyce started. "Ah, so you think——"

"I think, sir, that we have grounds for suspicion."

The door opened, and Mr. Thomas came in.

"Here, Thomas," said Boyce, "this is in your line.

Just look at these two papers and see whether you think they were done by the same typewriter."

Thomas examined them with a careful scrutiny. "At first sight I should certainly say that they were done by the same class of machine, but it will require careful microscopic inspection to ascertain whether it was really the same machine. There are generally peculiarities with regard to the way in which certain letters are worn. If I may take these papers, I will give you a considered report."

"Please do so, and I hope you will realise the great importance of the matter. Now, Curtis," said Boyce, when he had heard the whole story, "leave this matter with me. You have done excellent work, and I will see that you receive full recognition, but the matter had now better be taken up by Scotland Yard. It will cause a great sensation"; and he rubbed his fat hands together.

Curtis felt a sense of disappointment. "Am I not to remain in London, then?" he asked.

"No, my boy, you had better return to Ketworth. I will let you know how we get on. And, mind, not a word to anyone."

A knock came at the door, and a clerk entered. "A gentleman to see you, sir," he said, handing a card to Boyce.

"Show him in," said Boyce, with a nod of dismissal to Curtis.

Boyce rose to his feet to greet the famous writer, Robert Kenyon. Like all men of his stamp, who are bullies to subordinates, Boyce was sycophantic where greatness was concerned. Nothing pleased

him more than to say at his club : " I was having a yarn to-day with General Bangs—you know, Freddie Bangs of the Brigade—great pal of mine. . . ."

" What can I do for you, Mr. Kenyon ? " he asked. " Won't you sit down ? "

Kenyon's face was grey and tired, and his hair a shade whiter than before. Deep lines marked his powerful, intellectual countenance. He looked years older than on the day of the murder, and took a seat wearily, placing his hat and gloves on the desk before him.

" Mr. Boyce, I have come to ask you whether you have any news of my wife, Mrs. Kenyon."

" I am sorry—deeply sorry, Mr. Kenyon. I have put my best men on to investigate, and mentioned that you had offered a very considerable reward. We are without any information at present."

" It is terribly worrying." Kenyon passed a thin, nervous hand over his forehead. " She has completely disappeared. At first I was not anxious—I thought she had just gone to friends, probably a little unhinged by the disaster—but now I am afraid of something worse——"

" You think that she may have——" Boyce stopped at the ominous word.

" I don't know. She never showed the slightest signs of a tendency that way. Of course, she is Irish and impulsive, but I cannot believe—no, I am sure she would not do that."

" There are other possibilities in your mind ? "

" Mr. Boyce, I will tell you. She and Kitty Lake

were deep in each other's confidence. Suppose the same hand—it may be my cursed imagination, but if she knew something, the same man may have committed another murder—a murder to hide a murder."

Boyce sat up straight in his chair.

"Surely not, Mr. Kenyon. I cannot believe that. Let's hope, as you say, it's your imagination. She may have gone off somewhere and lost her memory. You remember one celebrated case of that kind——"

"I know. I know. That's what I try and tell myself. But I have always felt that the deed was that of a madman, and he may have lured her away on some pretext. Your men have been most helpful; they have searched the whole of my London house for some traces or clues, but without results."

"There is one possibility, but I hardly like to mention it."

Boyce looked everywhere but at the other, and stabbed his blotting-pad with a penknife.

"Please do; we must exhaust every possibility."

"Well—forgive me, Mr. Kenyon—I suppose she could not have gone off voluntarily, with—someone?"

Kenyon gripped his chair till his knuckles turned white with the pressure.

"Good God, man, don't put that into my head. Haven't I feared it night and day? It haunts me. But who? Who in the world? She was absolutely loyal and devoted to me. I have never had a moment's doubt of her affection. Of course, I am

considerably older than my wife," he added sadly. "I suppose middle-aged men do feel jealous at times, but—— No, I am sure you are wrong."

Boyce saw that Kenyon was fighting hard against a suspicion he was trying to banish from his mind.

"There's only one thing," he said. "We must inform the Press, and ask for their help—offer your reward publicly, and get the B.B.C. to broadcast an appeal."

Kenyon groaned. "Yes, you are right ; but I had hoped to have avoided this publicity. It's hateful to me. To have it discussed in every club—people shrugging their shoulders and saying, 'Poor Kenyon!'—I can stand anything but pity, Mr. Boyce. Still, if there's no other course, we must take it. I should never forgive myself if we had left a stone unturned."

"Very well, I will see about it at once."

"I suppose," said Kenyon, rising, "you are no nearer the discovery of the murderer? It seems rapidly becoming an unsolved mystery."

"No, not that," said Boyce pompously. "I don't think it will be an unsolved mystery."

"You have some idea, then?"

"I think we may be shortly in a position to take action. I have gone carefully into the whole case, and given my personal attention to the matter. There may be developments."

"You suspect someone, then?"

"I cannot say more at present, but you will certainly hear something within the next few days."

"I am sure I am glad to hear that; this waiting time is very trying. So you really have something definite? To me it is all dark, though I have studied criminal cases for years. But you people have all the information, of course; that makes a difference."

## CHAPTER X

## ARREST

"Mr. Anthony, no doubt you will guess the reason for our presence here, and, before you say anything, I have to warn you that any statement you may make may be used as evidence against you."

Anthony had just come back from the theatre and found two police officers waiting for him at his flat. His man was standing near, plunged in the deepest distress.

"I don't know what on earth you are here for, but I have sufficient knowledge of the affairs of the world to understand that you are trying to arrest me for something," said Anthony quietly.

"I arrest you for the murder of Miss Kitty Lake."

"Good God, what are you saying? Oh, I suppose it's no good arguing with the law, but I can tell you at once that I had nothing whatever to do with that horrible business. I don't believe I am capable of murdering anyone, least of all a poor, defenceless girl."

The inspector remained unmoved. "You will have ample opportunity of stating your case. Now I am afraid we must take you with us. I have a taxi outside."

"But do you mean seriously that you are going to take me to prison right away, without a chance of

putting my affairs straight? Do you realise what it means to me?"

"I am afraid that is so. You will be able to send for a lawyer when you get to Brixton."

"It's too horrible. Can't I clear myself here and now?"

"I am afraid not, and really, for your own interest, I should advise you to say as little as possible."

"This is too awful," said Anthony, gazing round in a hopeless fashion at the familiar objects of his daily life.

They hustled him down the stairs into the waiting cab. His mind was in a whirl. It was all so unexpected, and the contrast between his bright flat and the gloom of a foul cell was overwhelming.

He was a public man, and people would ask at the theatre to-morrow why he was not performing, and be told—oh, God!—that he'd been arrested for murder. Worse, the papers to-morrow morning would be filled with the news of his arrest. The stain would never be wiped off, even when he had cleared himself. The squalid discomfort of the dark cell, with its stone floor and locked door, was nothing to his mental anguish. He could see the papers giving details of his personality, and grotesque photographs of himself as Hamlet or Macbeth. Darkness enclosed him, and he lay tortured on a plank bed covered with evil-smelling blankets, waiting for a hopeless dawn.

In the morning the lawyer to whom he had sent an urgent message arrived, and Anthony told him of his plight, but for the moment there was nothing to be done. He was hurried into a motor-car, closely guarded by two policemen, and driven to Ketworth.

The clean country air was a relief after the foul London cell, and a sort of dazed apathy came over him which saved him from madness. He had a recollection of being brought before a row of magistrates in a court-room crowded with eager sightseers. The proceedings were purely formal, the police asking for a remand, and he was hurried back to London to spend long hours and days in tortured anguish.

Mr. Forbes, his lawyer, was a worried though prosperous man with an abrupt manner. He was known to be seeking a seat in Parliament, but, in spite of that, was reputed to be a man of brains.

Anthony could only tell him that he did not commit the crime and had no hand in it, but this did not seem to satisfy the lawyer.

" The first thing to do is to establish an alibi that will clear you," the lawyer said incisively. " I suppose there will be no difficulty in that ? "

" I was staying at the Ivy Bush Hotel, and went for a walk. That is all I can say."

" Humph ! Where did you go to ? "

" Just for a walk in the country. I don't know the locality well."

" Did you meet anyone at all who could identify you ? "

" No."

" I am bound to tell you," said the lawyer, pacing the floor, " that the police have very strong evidence —very strong indeed."

" I can't help it, Mr. Forbes. I can only tell you I am innocent."

The lawyer rose to go, and there was a heavy frown on his face.

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" Have you any particular choice of a counsel ? " he asked.

" No. Can you suggest someone ? "

The lawyer thought for a moment.

" In a case like this I should like to see Sir James Duncan. He will be the very best, but it is not on his circuit, and the fees will be higher in consequence."

" Never mind the fees ; get the best man. But what do you mean by a case like this ? "

" Well," said the other, looking anywhere but at Anthony, " I am bound to tell you that it will need a very powerful appeal to get you off."

" What ? Do you mean there is a chance of my being convicted ? "

" I am expressing no opinion ; all I can say is that the evidence is very strong indeed " ; and he shook his head.

Anthony was about to say something further, but the wooden look of the lawyer deterred him.

" I will see Sir James, and try and persuade him to take the case, but I know he is very full up."

" All right, do what you think best," said Anthony. He was tired of the man, and only too anxious to get rid of him. If his own lawyer took this line, his chances were not great.

It was some days after this that an officer opened his cell door and announced that he was wanted. He was taken to the room where visitors were allowed, and left with his solicitor and the great advocate, Sir James Duncan, while observation was kept through a glass door.

The great man disappointed Anthony. He was

small and grizzled, with pince-nez and a self-important manner. The absurd deference which the solicitor paid him nauseated Anthony.

Sir James shook hands in a perfunctory manner and opened the conversation, slowly pacing the room with his hands behind his back.

"Mr. Forbes has asked me to undertake your defence," he said, "and, though I am very full up with important cases, I am willing to do so if you desire it." He waited for an answer, and fixed Anthony with a stony stare through his glasses.

"I should be pleased if you would do so," said Anthony.

"You will not want me at the police-court proceedings, of course," he said. "Mr. Forbes will look after your interests there."

"What do you mean? Isn't there a chance of getting off then?"

"I am afraid none whatever, unless you can establish a complete and overwhelming alibi, which Mr. Forbes says you are not in a position to do."

"Then the case will have to go to the assizes?"

"Undoubtedly, and you had better reserve your defence."

He paused in his walk, and looked at Anthony with a pair of steely eyes. "You will have to consider your position carefully—very carefully—and let Mr. Forbes know what conclusion you arrive at."

"I do not understand, Sir James," said Anthony, in a puzzled tone.

"Very well; I can say no more. I shall see you with Mr. Forbes before the trial."

A shiver ran through Anthony at the ill-omened word, but he stood up to say good-bye, and then the officer took him back to his cell and the iron door clanged to.

The proceedings at the police court passed him by like a dream. The hateful surroundings, the cell with its heavily barred windows, and the horrible food made his life a hell, but a merciful mental stupor saved him from much of the terror.

In the court he saw blurred, inquisitive faces gazing at him as at a spectacle, and in a dream he heard witnesses testifying to his guilt. It was as though he were performing in a play of rather gruesome character.

At the police court every word of the evidence had to be taken down painfully in "longhand," and read over and signed by each witness.

Acting on his lawyer's advice, Anthony "reserved his defence," and was duly committed to the assizes.

It was a relief to him to get away from the court, even to the horrors of his cell, where at least he could be alone.

His had been a singularly lonely life. He had been brought up by an old, kind-hearted, but reserved uncle, who had died while Anthony was at Oxford, leaving him comfortably off. He had been able to study his profession without the dreary drudgery which so many poor men have to undergo before success reaches them. His appearance, voice, and manner helped him, but his intense desire to succeed, and whole-hearted attention to his work, had been the main factors in his astonishing success.

As he lay on his prison bed his thoughts went back to the years that had passed, and a feeling of bitterness came over him.

Of course, he might have known !

His success had been too rapid, the path too rose-strewn. The high gods had grown jealous, and hurled this thunderbolt at him.

One letter he received from Madeline Lake full of assurances of trust and confidence. " Mother and I are certain that you are not guilty of this crime, and a woman's instinct is worth all the evidence in the world," she wrote. He was allowed to answer her. If she of all people, whose sister had been the victim of the deed, could still believe in him, surely others would do so.

And so the days passed till the trial was approaching. Forbes, his solicitor, had come and taken down his statements, but his manner became more and more frigid, a fact which Anthony was quick to notice.

" I have tried everywhere to find someone who saw you on that walk, but have failed," he said.

Anthony remained silent.

" Are you quite sure you can throw no light on the matter ? Is there nothing you are hiding from me ? If there is, let me implore you to tell it."

" Nothing," said Anthony firmly.

Forbes looked at his voluminous statement of the case. " The note written to the dead girl—the prosecution say it was written with your typewriter, and on your paper. Is that so ? "

" I never wrote to her at all."

Forbes's face cleared. " If you can prove that, it

will be something. The footmarks outside the window—they are the exact size of your own boots. Could anyone have had access to yours ? "

" I suppose so. I had several pairs with me on my visit, and, of course, my man looked after my footwear at my flat."

" Ah, and he would have access to your typewriter ? "

" Yes ; but you are not suggesting that poor William had anything to do with it ? "

" It is always useful to have an alternative theory, or something which may shake evidence. But Sir James will be here in a few moments. It is not etiquette nowadays for a counsel to see the person he defends alone. There was a celebrated case where this led to disaster, but anything you have to say will be through me."

The door opened and Sir James was ushered in.

Anthony felt that the whole thing was a waste of time. The same questions were put to him again and again, till he felt that he was being subjected to the " Third Degree," and almost told them to get out and have done with it. Finally, Sir James rose to his feet and said in a halting manner : " Well, Mr. Anthony, I am going to say something, and if, after what has been said, you still want me to go on with the case, I will do so. If you wish to get the services of another counsel, I will withdraw."

Anthony waited in silence.

" In many cases," Sir James continued, " not necessarily murder trials, there may be a chance of making an appeal on definite lines. . . . This chance can be used only in certain contingencies. . . . If the

way to such an appeal is barred . . . well, it may remove a possible chance which might otherwise present itself. Do you follow me ? "

What on earth did he mean by all this jargon ?

" I am afraid I don't understand you, Sir James," said Anthony.

" I can hardly put it plainer, eh, Forbes ? "—and he glanced at the solicitor.

" What Sir James means, I think, is that extenuating circumstances can be brought forward in certain cases. There is, for example, the possibility in a murder trial of manslaughter, or even of pleading the *crime passionel*—but, of course, there is no need for any man to commit himself."

There was no mistaking the meaning now, and Anthony rose to his feet in impotent rage. " Do you mean that you think I did the murder, and if I say it was the result of a moment's impulse, or something of that sort, I might save myself from the gallows ? How dare you suggest such a thing ! "

Forbes put up a deprecating hand. " Steady, Mr. Anthony. Pray do not get excited. I am sure Sir James never imagined such a thing. He was merely seeking a line of defence."

" Well, I tell you that it was a foul suggestion. I never committed the crime—never, never ! "

The two men of law exchanged glances. " Very well," said Sir James. " Do you still wish me to undertake your defence ? "

" What can I do ? The trial is in two days' time. Certainly I hope you will, Sir James."

" I will do the best I can," said Sir James doubtfully.

Forbes intervened. " Sir James is a great fighter. If anyone can help you, he can."

When Anthony had been led away, Sir James turned to Forbes. " Stupid fellow ! " he said. " It was really his only chance—a precious small one ; but now—he has left me a pretty job."

## CHAPTER XI

## THE TRIAL

The assize court at Lewchester, the county town, was packed to overflowing when the "Littleworth Murder Case," as it was called, came on for hearing. There were Society women in plenty, and many leading authors and actors, beside the ordinary curious public.

The positions of the principals in this deadly drama had lifted it out of the ordinary, and to those who had followed the proceedings in the lower court there was but one possible ending.

The buzz of conversation was hushed as the judge entered and bowed elaborately to the standing audience ; three times—to the Bar, to the jury, and to the public—and then took his seat. His marshal, looking like a figure from the waxworks, sat on his right, staring into vacancy from the start to the finish of the proceedings.

There were a few preliminaries, the barristers exchanged cheery greetings, and the reporters waited expectantly.

Then the case was called in loud tones, and Anthony, attended by two large policemen, entered the dock. He was deadly pale and had aged terribly, for the strain on such a sensitive nature had told its tale. The cruel watching faces in the court maddened

him. He felt like a victim at the gladiatorial games entering the arena, while the fashion of Rome waited to see him torn limb from limb, and his smoking entrails strewn upon the sand.

At the very thought his pride came to his rescue, and he braced himself for the ordeal. He heard the charge read out—murder foul and unprovoked ; a vile thing, too awful to contemplate—and then the judge was blinking at him, and he heard the question from the clerk of the court, " Do you plead guilty or not guilty ? "

It was monstrous even to ask such a question, but his livid lips had answered, " Not guilty," in what the reporters called a firm voice, before he was aware that he had spoken.

The Crown Prosecutor was a pushful Hebrew named Hapsley Smidt, a dreadful little toad with sallow face, who wore glasses and was perpetually grinning in a shamefaced, obsequious way. He rose to his feet and gazed round the court as though for effect, and then adjusted his glasses.

" May it please you, m'lud, gentlemen of the jury " (there were no women jurists, for which Anthony was profoundly thankful), " there has never been a case in my experience of the Bar, which has been a long one, of a more painful nature than this. The murdered girl was young and beautiful, and at the very threshold of a great career on the stage, where she had already made her mark.

" The prisoner in the dock is a man of high attainments, and one to whom no measure of fame seemed unattainable. Moreover, he is one who has borne a

spotless character in a profession where reputations are under a fierce searchlight."

Everyone felt that he had begun well.

"There is a popular impression that circumstantial evidence, where there is no direct evidence to prove guilt, is dangerous, but in many cases when there is complete corroboration it is more reliable than direct evidence. In this case I hope to show the jury that the chain of evidence connecting the prisoner with the crime is complete and damning, and can only lead to the conclusion that, in spite of his appearance and character, he has been guilty of one of the most heartless and fiendish murders it is possible to imagine. There cannot even be palliating circumstances which might be pleaded by the defence that the deed was the result of sudden impulse, for, if the evidence is to be believed, the whole diabolical crime was carefully planned with cunning and skill.

"What are the actual facts?

"On June 10 of this year, at the cottage known as 'The Nest,' near Littleworth, Mr. Kenyon, the well-known playwright, was staying with his wife and secretary. Miss Kitty Lake had come to spend a few days with them, and, in point of fact, had been there exactly seven days—a fact which I wish you to notice—when the fatal event occurred.

"On the afternoon of that day, between five and six o'clock, Miss Lake retired to the sitting-room of her own accord and locked the door, but left the windows open. These are French windows which open directly into the garden. Here is a plan of the house, which I would like the jury to inspect."

The solicitor for the prosecution handed the

document round, while each juryman carefully examined it in turn.

" Mr. Kenyon and Captain Farrar were in the living-room discussing a new play when they heard sounds of talking in the study. One voice was that of a man and the other was Miss Lake's, evidently labouring under considerable emotion. She used the words, ' Do go away ; nothing but ruin can come of it.'

" Captain Farrar ran round to the garden entrance to ascertain who the man could be, as they knew of no one who was likely to call. Mr. Kenyon tried to force the door. When they broke into the room the murderer had gone and the girl was lying on the floor with her throat cut. Death must have been instantaneous, and she did not even cry out.

" The medical evidence will show that Miss Lake was in a certain condition, a highly important fact as providing a possible motive for the crime.

" I shall prove to you by the evidence that the prisoner had played the leading part in several of Mr. Kenyon's plays with Miss Lake, and that they had been thrown much in each other's company.

" There was, therefore, every opportunity for an illicit passion to have grown up, and with men of the emotional type of the prisoner it is easily understandable, however reprehensible, but we are not here as a court of morals.

" Now you must follow carefully the prisoner's movements. He comes to stay at Littleworth three days before the event, without telling either Mr. or Mrs. Kenyon that he is in the vicinity, and his reason given at the inquest is that he did not want to appear

as though trying to get the principal part, though he had been acting as such in the last three plays of Mr. Kenyon's. The jury will be able to use their own judgment as to the weight to be given to that statement.

" On the afternoon of the crime he goes for a walk, and the time he was away from the Ivy Bush Hotel coincides exactly with that he would have taken to have gone to ' The Nest ' and returned. This has been carefully checked.

" He can give no account of where he went, nor did he meet anyone who could identify him.

" I shall bring evidence to show that a glove was picked up in the wood outside the garden entrance to ' The Nest ' which has been identified as belonging to the prisoner, and the fellow one was left behind at the ' Ivy Bush ' by him. The two are a pair beyond a shadow of doubt, as the maker will testify.

" Now we come to the evidence of the maid-of-all-work at the cottage—Sarah Middleton. If hers had been the only evidence, I should not have asked the jury to place too much credence upon it, as she seems a trifle deficient in brains without actually being mentally defective.

" She states that, on the day before the crime, a man met her in the wood as she was coming to the house, and gave her a note sealed in an envelope and asked her to give it to the young lady.

" There was no address on it, but she took it, together with a half-crown which the man gave her.

" She has positively identified the prisoner as the man who gave her the note. She gave it to Miss Lake, who took it without comment.

" The contents of the note were as follows."

Here Smidt read out the document.

" This letter was in type, but it has been ascertained that it was typed on the typewriter in the prisoner's flat. I shall call expert evidence to show that there are certain peculiarities in some of the letters which render this positive.

" If any doubt exists, however, it will also be shown that the paper used is exactly the same as that found on the prisoner's desk, and is of a somewhat unusual kind.

" On the morning after the crime, Superintendent Sinclair of Scotland Yard, assisted by Sergeant Curtis of the local police, took careful measurement of the footprints outside the window. There were marks which bore out the statements made by Mr. Kenyon and Captain Farrar, and two sets of impressions have been traced as belonging to the prisoner's boots, which they fit exactly. The police have established still further that the particular pair of boots which the prisoner wore on the day of the crime were the ones which caused these marks, as there are definite peculiarities in the way in which they have been worn.

" I come now to one of the most baffling factors connected with the crime, and one for which I will give the fullest allowance to the defence. On the night of the murder, Superintendent Sinclair stayed in the room where the murder had been committed. He stated in evidence at the inquest that the murderer returned, presumably to get possession of the note, in case it had not been already found.

" The prisoner, with Mr. Kenyon and Captain

Farrar, were all stopping in the living-room at Sinclair's special request, and if, as the prosecution allege, the prisoner stole out and tried to get through the window while the other two were sleeping, it is difficult to understand why anyone with Superintendent Sinclair's reputation should have stated that he knew who the murderer was and yet remained silent as to his identity."

Sir James Duncan rose to his feet.

" You will pardon me interrupting, but I have the evidence before me. Superintendent Sinclair did not state that he knew who the murderer was ; he said he knew the man who came in the night."

Smidt looked at the other coldly.

" To my mind it is the same thing, but my learned friend is entitled to his point.

" To continue. We have endeavoured to get into touch with Sinclair, who has been summoned away to a very important case abroad, but we have just received a cable to say that all trace of him has been lost."

There was a mild sensation in court.

" With an ordinary man this might give cause for alarm, but, as he is engaged in an extremely delicate business, it may be that he does not wish to disclose his whereabouts. That, at any rate, is the opinion of the police.

" Now we come to a piece of evidence of the highest importance, which has only been brought to light since the police-court proceedings, though, of course, I have informed my learned friend, the counsel for the defence.

" The crime was committed with a very sharp

knife with a wooden handle. This knife has now been traced as belonging to the prisoner."

He paused, and all eyes in the court were fixed on the wretched being in the box. Smidt slowly sipped water, to let the point go home, and then continued:

"You will hear in evidence that a left-hand chamois leather glove was found in the wood. This will be found to have been the property of the prisoner, and the fellow one was found in his room at the Ivy Bush Hotel.

"Evidence will be called to prove that the crime was done by a left-handed man, and the prisoner's valet will tell you that the prisoner is left-handed.

"Doubtless because the prisoner was wearing a glove, there were no fingerprints.

"This is the evidence which I shall bring before you, gentlemen, and I think you will have no difficulty in coming to the conclusion, without a shadow of doubt, that the prisoner is the man who committed this ruthless crime on an inoffensive girl—a crime to hide a crime, deliberately planned and carried out without pity or remorse.

"I think we can sketch out without difficulty the working of the prisoner's scheme.

"Thrown in contact with the beautiful Miss Lake, intimacy takes place. It was either a passing fancy or there may have been a definite attachment. Then something happens which perhaps we shall never know. His passion cools, or another woman appears on the scene. He wishes to get rid of the girl whom he has ruined. Perhaps she had threatened to expose him to her host and hostess—who knows? At any rate, he arranges a meeting, and comes armed with a

deadly knife and wearing a glove which prevents fingerprints from showing. The poor girl had fallen into the trap and locked herself up in the room, leaving the window open for his entry.

" He comes in and holds a whispered conversation, and then deliberately cuts her throat and flees from the room, scared at the sounds of Mr. Kenyon trying to break down the door.

" This is the outline of the case, and I will now proceed to call evidence."

Such, in an abbreviated form, was the speech for the prosecution, though boiled down very considerably, for Smidt was verbose and fond of his own voice.

Mr. Kenyon and Captain Farrar repeated the evidence they had already given at the inquest.

Then Sergeant Curtis stepped into the box. He detailed the steps he had taken in the case.

" A left-handed chamois leather glove was handed to you on the day after the crime, I believe ? "

" It was actually handed to Superintendent Sinclair, who gave it to me."

" And the fellow one ? "

" That was left behind at the Ivy Bush Hotel by the prisoner."

" You ascertained that they were a pair ? "

" Yes, sir. The maker's name was inside, and the man at the shop remembers quite well selling them to the prisoner."

Evidence was produced that Anthony had purchased a knife from a shop in the Strand, the private mark on the blade being identified. And then William, Anthony's man, entered the box, sadly and

on the verge of tears. He could only confirm what the prosecuting counsel had said with regard to his master being left-handed, and identified the golf-clubs which were produced in court.

He tried to do his best. " Mr. Anthony has cured himself of using his knife and fork in a left-handed manner, so I don't see how he could have done it."

He was pulled up sharp by Smidt with the curt remark, " You were not asked to give your opinion, but to answer questions." With a pathetic look at his master he retired.

" That concludes the case for the prosecution," Smidt announced at last. " There is one other witness who might have been called, but her evidence is not of great importance. I refer to Mrs. Kenyon, who, I am sorry to say, is still missing. All efforts to trace her have been unsuccessful. I am sure the court feel sympathy with her husband in the terrible ordeal through which he has passed."

During the adjournment which followed, Forbes had a hurried conversation with Anthony. " Sir James wishes to know whether, after what you have heard, you still wish to go into the box and give evidence."

" Why, certainly."

" Very well, but you need not unless you like."

" Oh, I know, and if I don't the judge will make damaging comments on the fact. I have read these cases before."

His nerve was wearing thin, and the solicitor himself was grey about the face and worried. " All right, I will call you," he said.

When the court reassembled, Sir James rose in his place.

" I do not propose to call any evidence otherwise than as to character except the prisoner himself," he announced.

By this means he would secure the last word, an important factor in murder cases.

Anthony took his stand in the box. He was calm and collected now, for he had that temperament which can rise to occasions, and, now that the last ordeal was on him, he was master of himself. He looked round in vain for one face which he longed to see and yet dreaded to find, but it was not there ; and then his eyes met those of Arthur Barratt, gazing at him as though fascinated. Something in his white set face arrested Anthony, and for a moment he could not remove his eyes from him.

There was anxiety, fear, and a look of suspense on Arthur's face.

And then Anthony heard Sir James speaking in level tones.

" Will you tell the jury exactly what you did on the afternoon of the murder ? "

" Yes. I had lunch at the Ivy Bush Hotel at Littleworth and then went for a walk."

" In what direction ? "

" I don't know the country well, but I should say towards the Downs—to the north."

Sir James frowned. " You mean in the direction of the cottage where the murder took place ? "

" I expect so."

The court gasped. Here was either a simple soul or a very cunning criminal who pretended candour.

"You met no one at all who could identify you?"

"Not a soul."

"When Captain Farrar found you in the 'Ivy Bush' and told you the news, you were surprised?"

"It was incredible to me. I did not even know until that day that Miss Lake was staying at the cottage."

Astonishment filled the court.

"Then I need not ask you whether you wrote that letter to Miss Lake?"

"I did not write that letter to her, nor have I ever written to her in my life."

"You saw a good deal of her at the theatre?"

"Very little, except at rehearsals. Her mother or Mr. Barratt usually called for her and took her home."

"Who is Mr. Barratt?"

"He is engaged to Miss Madeline Lake, the sister of Miss Kitty Lake."

"I see. Now, tell me, can you account for your glove being found in the wood near the cottage?"

"I must have dropped it somewhere."

"You mean that someone picked it up?"

"Possibly."

"How can you account for the knife which belonged to you being the weapon with which the murder was done?"

"I cannot account for it. I gave it to Miss Lake."

Here was desperate dealing, and the listeners thought the lie too thin and rather mean.

"You can throw no light whatever on the mystery, then? There is no one whom you suspect?"

"It is unaccountable to me."

" I have to ask you formally—did you commit the crime, or have any knowledge of it ? "

" No, I had no part whatever in it," Anthony said firmly and steadily.

Sir James sat down, and Smidt rose to cross-examine.

" You have heard it given in evidence that the marks of the footsteps outside the window correspond exactly with your own boot. Can you account for that ? "

" My boots were being obviously worn by someone."

" So you suggest that someone stole your boots and put them on for the occasion, though the evidence shows that they were the actual pair you used that day ? "

" I suggest nothing."

" Very well, we will leave it at that. And you think someone went into your flat and used your typewriter and paper to write that note ? "

There was no answer.

" It has been stated that you use a knife with your right hand. Does that mean that you could not use it with your left ? "

" Only very clumsily. I cured myself years ago of that habit."

" I see," said Smidt, with sarcasm, " and yet you use golf-clubs which are left-handed ? "

" Certainly."

" You have heard the evidence of Sarah Middleton. She has sworn that you gave her a note."

" I cannot be answerable for everything a half-witted girl says."

" That is no answer. Did you or did you not give this girl a letter for Miss Lake ? "

" Certainly not."

" Then she is a liar ? "

" I did not say so."

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders and looked at the jury.

" You say you gave the knife to Miss Lake. Wasn't that a strange present to give a girl ? "

" Let me explain. In the last play in which we were acting together I had to kill her in the last act. On one occasion I was going on the stage and found the stage knife had been mislaid. There was no time to waste, so I took this knife. After the performance I told her, and she made some joke about my using a real knife, so I gave it to her as a souvenir."

" Oh, so you had been used to killing her on the stage ? "

" My Lord," said Sir James, rising in anger, " I submit that that is a most improper remark."

" I agree," said the judge severely. " It is highly improper, and must be withdrawn."

" I apologise, my lord, and certainly withdraw it," said Smidt, completely put out of his stride by the rebuff. " That is all I have to say," he said, and sat down.

Anthony had come better out of the ordeal than Sir James had dared to hope, but when Smidt had made his final speech it was with a heavy heart that he rose to fight for the prisoner's life.

" M'lud, gentlemen of the jury, my learned friend the counsel for the Crown has told you that this case rests on circumstantial evidence. There is not one

shadow of direct evidence to connect my client with the murder, but, on the contrary, I submit that his character and conduct are against the supposition that he was the culprit. He has told you frankly in the box that he went for a walk in the very direction of the fatal cottage, but he might easily have said he went in the opposite direction, since no one saw him.

" He stayed on quietly at the ' Ivy Bush,' to which he had gone under his own name, without any attempt at disguise, and he came straight away with Captain Farrar and slept the night in the room next to that in which the murder was committed. Such action would imply a cold, callous nature, hardened in crime, and I submit that the temperament of the prisoner is entirely against such conduct.

" Is it credible that he would dare to commit cold-blooded murder with a single door between himself and two men who might come in at any moment, instead of arranging a meeting in the woods, which he could easily have done ?

" There is not a tittle of evidence to show that he was in any way responsible for the girl's condition. He has told you that he did not write the letter, but, even if the jury come to the conclusion that he did, which I will not for a moment admit, there is no reference to anything in that letter except to a love which the writer has for the girl.

" The medical evidence is emphatic that suicide is out of the question on account of the nature of the wound, but I would seriously submit to the jury that it is possible for a girl in the frenzy of despair to have exercised strength which would not otherwise be possible.

" My learned friend has said that circumstantial evidence is sometimes more reliable than direct. I agree, but circumstantial evidence is a dangerous weapon to play with. In real life, as in fiction, there are sometimes the most amazing coincidences which, taken together, would lead a jury to assume guilt when the accused person has been the victim of circumstances.

" Thus if you believe the straightforward tale my client has told you with regard to the knife, a fact which appears damning becomes capable of a simple explanation.

" The evidence of the girl Middleton I submit is quite unreliable. She has brooded over the crime, and, as we have heard, she was found raving in the empty cottage. It is likely that her disordered brain imagined things she believes true.

" There remains the evidence of the typewritten letter and the gloves, and in both these cases it is dangerous to draw conclusions from such evidence, as both may be capable of some logical explanation."

Here a juror interjected, " The footprints ? "

" Yes, the footprints. Well, without disputing the very careful evidence of the experts, the traces were acknowledged to be faint, and many footprints may be almost identical. There is no certainty about it. We cannot take it for granted that they were the same.

" This man is on trial for his life, and what is dearer to him than life—his honour. If you are not convinced that the evidence you have heard is overwhelming, you take the heavy responsibility of sending to a felon's death possibly an innocent man.

" If this case had been tried in Scotland on the

evidence that has been given, I have little doubt that a verdict of ' Not Proven ' would have been returned, if he were not acquitted, and if you have any doubt in your minds he is entitled to the benefit. The burden of the decision rests with you."

Throughout the speech, of which only parts are here given, Anthony's mind was occupied, not with the gravity of his position or the effect of the speech on the jury, but on the marvellous ways of lawyers. Here was his counsel, who believed him guilty of a foul crime, calmly trying to prove him innocent.

His thoughts were brought to earth by the voice of the judge summing up.

From his first muttered words till the end he summed up dead against the prisoner, to whom he referred as " this young actor " in tones of scathing contempt, as though this alone was a criminal offence.

He went through the evidence with deadly precision, especially with regard to the expert evidence, which he emphasised as being quite impartial. He finished by saying that if no one was to be convicted on anything but direct evidence, half the crimes in the country would remain undetected.

He was particularly severe on the prisoner's statement remarking that when a man was in a corner this is just the sort of tale he would tell.

It was all over at last. The jury retired, and Anthony was conducted below by the officers, where he had to endure a long and agonising wait while the jury made up their minds. The policemen conversed in low tones, but Anthony heard them.

" What'll it be, do you think ? " asked one.

" Oh, he'll be swung all right. No doubt of that. Old Jaggers was hot stuff. Bit unfair, I thought, but he's done for."

A bell sounded, and they rose and beckoned Anthony, who went up the stairs with feet of lead. A policeman stood on each side of him, and another was at his back.

The jury were filing back into their box, their faces flushed, and, as Anthony searched their countenances for some sign, he noticed with a sinking of the heart that not one of them would look at him.

The judge entered, and the court stood up.

In a solemn hush the clerk of the court asked the dreadful question.

" Gentlemen of the jury, have you considered your verdict ? "

" We have," said the foreman, and his face went suddenly from red to white.

" Do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty ? "

" Guilty," came the terrible answer.

" Is that the opinion of you all ? "

" Yes, sir," said the man, and sat down hurriedly.

The judge solemnly asked Anthony whether he had anything to say, but he merely shook his head. His dry tongue refused him speech. A strange calm came over him now the worst had come. He saw the chaplain step forward and adjust a square of black on the judge's wig, and even noticed that it was badly put on, so that the corner fell over his eye, giving him a dissipated look. He almost felt inclined to laugh. Darkness was falling, and the lights had not been turned on. There was a hot, stuffy feeling

in the court, and a sound like a sob, hastily suppressed.

The judge was speaking, and Anthony stood rigid.

"George Anthony, the jury have found you guilty on the clearest evidence, and I am bound to say that I entirely agree with their decision. Your crime is so dreadful that nothing which I could say would add to the terrible position in which you find yourself. You started by an intrigue, possibly thinking little of the awful consequences of your conduct, and from the betrayal of the young girl your guilty conscience suggested a possible way to hide your crime. But justice has found you out, and by the very mistakes you have committed you have brought yourself to retribution. I can hold out no hopes that the decision of the jury will be reversed in another court, and you cannot build on that, but should spend the time allotted to you in making your peace with God, whose commandments you have outraged.

"The sentence of the court is——"

But Anthony heard no more. A black mist came before his eyes, and then the policeman touched him on the shoulder and he went below, leaving unsaid the few words which might have saved his life.

## CHAPTER XII

## THE SANDS RUN OUT

Madeline and her mother waited all the afternoon for news. The sun-blinds were drawn down and the lounge of the bungalow was in semi-darkness. The ordeal was almost unbearable. Waiting and thinking are so much harder than doing things.

Every day they had scanned the papers, hoping that something might happen—an arrest or a confession—which would prove Anthony's innocence. But the time had passed, and this was the fateful day of the trial.

A figure came slowly along the road, his head drooping with dejection. The sun was setting, and a lurid bank of cloud tinged with blood-red was humped up in the west. The air was still and hot, and not a ripple showed on the glassy surface of the sea. There was thunder in the air.

Arthur Barratt had motored from Lewchester and left his car at the local hotel. His was a distasteful task, and he preferred to walk to the bungalow. He had sworn he would not come back to Madeline till his innocence had been proved, and here was the strongest proof possible by the verdict of twelve good men and true, but he was not at all certain that Madeline would look at it in the same light. Women were queer creatures of instinct.

He paused more than once on his way, and leant on the railings which surrounded the bungalow garden.

Should he go on, or write? Would Madeline greet him with tears and contrition, or order him from the door a second time? Finally he made up his mind, and strode forward, determined to see the thing through.

He raised the sun-blinds and entered the open window, and stood before the two women.

In a dry voice Madeline spoke. "What have you come here for?"

"I told you," he said, "that I wouldn't see you again until I had the clearest proof of my own innocence. Unfortunately, I have the most terrible proof of all. The truth is out at last."

"What do you mean?" Madeline asked, her eyes staring at him in horror.

"Anthony was found guilty this afternoon, and condemned to death."

Madeline gave a cry and put her hands over her face, while her mother burst into tears.

"I will never believe it," the girl cried, "never! I don't care what all the juries in England may say—he is innocent, I tell you, and the very way you tell the news is an insult. How dare you think George could do a thing like that!"

"And yet," he said bitterly, "you were willing enough to believe me guilty."

"Perhaps I was wrong," she said wearily. "It's not for me to judge. At present I can think of nothing but poor George. It's too awful."

"But I was there the whole time. He had a

perfectly fair trial, and his counsel did everything he could, but I never heard clearer evidence in my life."

"Then you believe him guilty?" she asked fiercely.

"How can one think otherwise? You would have been convinced if you had been there."

"Never. And to show how little I believe it, I shall go and see him."

"Madeline, in the condemned cell?"

"In the condemned cell, yes," she said, lifting her head, "and offer him what comfort I can."

Mrs. Lake had ceased crying, and sat up wiping her reddened eyes. "My dear," she said in mild protest, "you can't possibly do that."

"Mother, I shall, and you shall come with me. If not, I will go alone."

"But, my dear, what will people say?"

"What do I care for that? Oh, if only Mr. Sinclair had been in England this would never have happened. I am sure of that."

"Mr. Sinclair has disappeared," said Barratt.

"How? You never told us."

"It was only revealed in court to-day. There is some mystery about it."

"Then our last hope is gone," said Madeline, giving way to despair for the first time. "I suppose he will appeal against the sentence?"

"I expect so, but the judge held that there was very little hope."

Madeline stamped her foot. "What does it matter what the judge says? You must get to work at once. There will be a petition to get up, and you must

go to Mr. Kenyon at once—he will help. He can arrange an interview for me with the Home Secretary. Do do something—don't stand there looking half-witted."

"Madeline, you are unreasonable," said her mother. "I think Arthur has been most kind in coming here after the way you have treated him."

"It's all right, Mrs. Lake," said Arthur bitterly. "I don't understand you, Madeline, at all. You seem to have completely changed since this thing happened. You've turned against me for some reason. And the only person you seem to care about is George Anthony. I've seen your sister go on like this before, but never you. I don't understand." There was a puzzled look on his face.

"There's nothing to understand," said Madeline firmly. "A friend of ours is in danger of a disgraceful death through a miscarriage of justice ; nothing else matters at the moment. Save his life—that's all I ask of you. I thought at least you were loyal and devoted, and would help me in this matter."

"Very well, I will do what I can. You can't expect me to work miracles. Heaven knows, we are in deep waters ! Good-bye."

There was a wistful look on his face, and Madeline softened for a moment. "Oh, Arthur," she said, taking his hand, "don't you see that none of us are normal at present ? This thing is racking our nerves. I am sorry if I have been unfair to you. Only save George's life, and things will be different."

"Damn the man !" said Barratt to himself. "What is she to him or he to her ? Anyone would

think she was in love with the fellow." He saw Madeline as something elusive, beyond his grasp, and yet more desirable on that very account. Others had power to move her. Anthony's plight had evoked her deep sympathy, if not more. Sinclair's strength had aroused her admiration, and Kenyon's mind and intellect was something on which she leant for support. But he—what good was he? To take messages, to ' do what he could.' She never asked his advice, and his opinion was scorned. Yet, by a strange paradox, she stood higher in his estimate now than ever before. He must prove himself a man—worthy of her—even if in so doing he had to go against his better judgment.

" I'll do what I can," he said, rising to go. " I'll go to Mr. Kenyon at once and see what he can do. Is there anything else *I* can do? "

Madeline leant forward with an eager, flushed face.

" Oh, if you would ! "

" What? "

" Arthur," she said timidly, " I hardly like to ask you—after what I have said. Would you do a really great favour? "

" I would do anything that I possibly can ; you know that, Madeline."

" It seems absurd—you will think me mad—but would you go and fetch Mr. Sinclair back? "

He was startled ; things came back to him. What had Sinclair said to him? That he should apply for leave, as he would need it. Had he such an eventuality in his mind, or was it mere chance? Then the absurdity of the whole thing appealed to his practical business mind. Fancy going on a wild-goose chase

after a great detective, engaged on important work ! And for what ?

Madeline was watching him keenly, and saw the workings of his mind mirrored on his face. " Oh, do go—for my sake," she cried.

" But, really, Madeline, what is the use ? A pretty fool I should look if, after wandering half over Europe, he asked me what I was wanting him for."

" I am sure—quite sure—I am right. I can't tell you why. There's something he knows, and——"

" And what ? "

" Listen, Arthur." There was an appeal in her blue eyes. " Don't laugh at me—I know you won't—but you know twins are peculiarly close to each other—*en rapport*, I believe they call it. Well, night after night I seem to have seen Kitty trying desperately hard to tell me something, and I know it's about Mr. Sinclair. The strange thing is that he seems to be in peril—wanting help—and it's we who need his help."

Barratt stiffened.

" Does she tell you nothing else ? " he asked harshly, the memory of her accusation rankling in his mind.

Madeline caught his meaning, and she shook her head sadly.

" I don't think it's any use at all, and all these fancies are morbid. If he can be fetched back, Scotland Yard can do it. I'll mention it to Mr. Kenyon."

She flushed as though he had struck her.

" I wish I were a man. I believe George's life hangs on it."

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" Well, I'll go. Say no more about it. I'll let you have a wire if I do anything out there. I'll see Kenyon first, and fix up about the matters you want done, and then get off. Sinclair did ask me to go to his secretary, I remember."

" There you are," said Madeline. " There's fate in it. Thank you, Arthur. You are returning good for evil."

He took his leave hastily, lest he should change his mind ; it all seemed so ridiculous, this mad expedition.

But his mind was set on success, and to do something would be a relief.

By hard going he arrived at Mr. Kenyon's house at ten o'clock, with a smoking radiator. He knew that Kenyon kept late hours, and a light shining from behind the curtains of the window showed him that he was still astir. In answer to his ring, the man himself opened the door, in a flowered dressing-gown over his evening clothes.

" Come in," he said to Barratt. " I sent the servants to bed. I can guess the reason for your call."

His manner was grave.

" Help yourself to a whisky and soda. You look done up."

" Thanks," Barratt looked round the wonderful study, made familiar by interviewers.

" Where have you been since the trial ? "

" I rode over to break the news to Madeline and her mother."

" How did they take it ? "

" Badly. They will not hear of his guilt. You

know what women are ; and Madeline wants to see George, in prison, and for us to get up a petition."

" I am afraid that would be hopeless. There is very little sympathy in cases like this. It's very terrible. I cannot believe, myself, that he is guilty. What do you think ? "

" I never heard such clear evidence in my life. There was not a flaw anywhere."

Kenyon leant forward, holding a cigar in his hand. " That may be, but, do you know, I don't believe he did it."

Barratt was startled. " You don't ? " he asked.

" No. I have studied crime and criminals, as you know, for my plays, and George is not capable of cutting anyone's throat. He is not the type. The other thing, possibly. These emotional men are easily led into intrigues of passion ; but not murder. But what's to be done ? "

" I suppose he will appeal, but it's useless. It's strange about Sinclair's disappearance."

" Disappearance ? He's dead."

" Dead ! When ? How ? "

" So the police think. He is reported murdered in Constantinople, but it all seems very vague and a little mysterious."

" Strange ! And Madeline wants me to go and fetch him."

" You ! Fetch him ? Whatever for ? "

" I don't know—she's got some idea that Sinclair could save Anthony—that he knows something. You remember his statement at the inquest."

" Oh, that's all moonshine. If he had known

anything definite, of course he would have made a statement to the police before he went."

Barratt took a sudden resolution.

"Well, I'm going. Anything to get away from here. And perhaps Madeline may think better of me."

Kenyon shrugged his shoulder. "As you like. I should have thought you would have been of more use here—still, better see Boyce, hadn't you?"

"No; they might put difficulties in the way. I shall just see Sinclair's secretary, since he asked me to. I have my passport, and I have been as far as Belgrade before. You wouldn't mind going to the Home Secretary about Anthony?"

"My dear fellow, I will go with pleasure. I know him pretty well. But what can I say? I should simply make a fool of myself. Could I tell him that a certain feeling I have is more important than the whole of the evidence?"

"Well, I don't see how I can do any more," said Barratt, rising. "You will arrange for Madeline to see George? She is very insistent on this."

"Certainly," said Kenyon.

There was a sharp ring at the door, and both men started.

Kenyon opened the front door, Barratt standing a little way behind him. A stalwart police constable stood on the step, and Barratt gave a stifled gasp.

"Is that your car outside?" the constable said. "You can't leave it standing there all night, you know."

Kenyon laughed. "It's all right, officer; my friend is just going." He shot a keen glance at Barratt and

held out his hand. "Good night. I will do what I can."

Barratt dropped a half-crown into the willing palm of the arm of the law, and climbed into his car. As he shot into the night he had a vision of a tall figure black against the light of the hall, motionless and menacing.

## CHAPTER XIII

## THE CONDEMNED CELL

George Anthony, like many another man cursed with imagination, had at times pictured to himself what the feelings must be of a man under sentence of death, in the condemned cell, waiting for the end.

Now the experience was his own. His first sensation was one of relief after the awful strain of the trial. He only wanted to be alone, but even this was denied him. Two warders were to be with him night and day, to see that he did not cheat the hangman. His tired brain could not at first grasp the situation. Every fibre of his nervous system was exhausted, and he lay on the hard bed unable to move or speak. In a dreamy way his mind turned to the death of Socrates, and he was wondering whether he would choose the poison cup. How easy, with his friends around him, it would be to make dignified exit—and then a grim vision brought his mind with a shock to reality. The early morning. The ghastly procession and the hanging rope.

Food was brought him, but he could not touch it, and the fat gathered thick on the noisome cocoa as it cooled.

The warders were silent but attentive. They were used to these cases, and had much sympathy for the man who was to be " topped," as they call it.

The chaplain came, a kindly soul who hated this part of his job. He spoke in commonplaces, neither trying to talk religion nor to refer to the position of the prisoner. Was there anything he could do? Anyone to whom Anthony would like to write, or to see?

And then came the governor and the doctor, and Anthony was glad when the iron-studded door was shut again.

He took his exercise alone, in a shut-in yard, when the other prisoners were within doors.

In the chapel he sat in a special box with two warders, and furtive eyes cast glances at him as at a curious animal.

The meaning of that box was only too well known to all.

Anthony listened to the services and marvelled at the hearty singing, not knowing that the very noise was used for muttered conversation, sometimes sung to the tunes of the hymns.

The lawyer Forbes came, and arranged in a perfunctory way for the appeal. He showed by his manner that he looked on it as sheer waste of time, and seemed more anxious to know how he was to get his fees than whether his client was likely to succeed in his appeal.

And so the days wore on. At times wild despair seized Anthony, and the strain was almost more than he could bear. He had half a mind to withdraw his appeal and get it over quickly. He was afraid of going mad. Then he would have moods of sheer apathy, when nothing seemed to matter.

The governor entered his cell, and Anthony stood

up to greet him. With him was the principal officer, holding his bunch of keys.

"There has been an application to see you, Anthony," said the governor. "Do you wish to see anyone?"

"Who is it, sir?" he asked.

"A certain Miss Madeline Lake," said the governor slowly, and looked the prisoner straight in the eyes.

It was an unusual request for the sister of a murdered girl to wish to see the murderer, and he doubted if he would have granted it, but it came direct from the Home Office, to whom Kenyon had gone, and he dared not refuse.

Anthony started. What on earth did Madeline want to see him for? To reproach him with her sister's murder? No, that was not like her. But, if not, to say that she forgave him? That would be intolerable.

"What does she want to see me for?" he asked.

"I do not know, she has made an application to the Home Office."

Anthony thought for a moment. Yes, he would see her. After all, nothing mattered now, and if she had taken all this trouble, he could not well refuse.

"Yes, I will see her," he said.

"Very well." Turning to the warder, the governor issued an order and went out.

Anthony was conducted to a small room divided into two halves by a sort of counter. Here he waited on one side with the warder. A door opened at the other end, and Madeline came in with her mother who had braced herself to the ordeal.

Anthony rose and faced them across the barrier.

Madeline was evidently acutely distressed, but showed a calm face. Without any preliminary she said : " George, I hope you don't mind mother and me coming to see you, but we felt we must come and tell you that we are certain, quite certain, that you are innocent. I am sure that there has been some hideous mistake, and we are both praying that something will happen to prove your innocence. You believe us, don't you ? "

It was some moments before Anthony could control his voice ; then he said :

" Thank you for those words. It's awfully good of you to come, and I am so thankful that you at least are sure that I had nothing to do with the horrible crime, or crimes."

There seemed nothing more to say ; it was so difficult. There was nothing to do—no help at all.

" Did anyone come with you ? I mean, besides your mother ? " he asked, to say something.

" No. Mr. Kenyon offered, but he has his own worries, and we declined. And Arthur——"

" Mr. Barratt ? " said Anthony coldly.

" Yes ; he's been splendid—he's gone off to try and fetch Mr. Sinclair back, if he can find him. Oh, I do hope he will ! "

Anthony gave a startled exclamation. He recalled the last time he had seen Sinclair, and the grave words, then meaningless, he had spoken—" If ever you want me, send for me "—and the way he had looked at him. Was there some mystery behind it all ?

A sudden rush of hope filled him, making him turn

giddy in his weak condition. The warder came forward hurriedly.

" I'm all right, officer," he said, recovering ; then, to Madeline, " That is very good of him, though I don't see what he can do."

" He's going to wire us at once when he finds him."

There was an awkward pause. There was nothing more to say. It was becoming painful to both of them, and Mrs. Lake, who had not spoken, was wiping her tear-dimmed eyes. It was like a final leave-taking.

Madeline was feeling the strain badly.

Anthony said good-bye hurriedly, and beckoned to the warder, who rose and opened the door. A cry echoed in his ears as the door closed behind him, and already the tomb seemed to be opening at his feet.

" O God," he moaned on his bed. " Must it be so ? Let me face it like a man, and not even speak in my sleep."

## CHAPTER XIV

## IN CONSTANTINOPLE

Superintendent Sinclair walked slowly across the new Galata Bridge from Stamboul to Pera. It would have been sacrilege to have ridden, and he had sent his luggage on to the Pera Palace Hotel, in order that he might watch the wonderful collection of humanity which flocked across the bridge. They were composed of every race under the sun, while the babble of fifty different languages filled the air.

On one side was the Golden Horn, stretching away inland in a great curve and dividing the old Moslem city of Stamboul from the more modern Pera ; and on the other the waters of the Bosphorus, dotted with shipping.

Scorning the underground lift, Sinclair made his way up the steep steps of the narrow street leading to the Rue de Pera, between rows of shops where carpets, pictures, and bric-à-brac were displayed. Here were Turks, Jews, Greeks, and coal-black niggers jostling each other. It was fascinating to a student of human nature whose whole life was spent in studying types.

Inside the Pera Palace Hotel, modern Europe shut out the ancient city, and one might have been in Paris, Vienna, or Berlin. Everything was up to date, including the charges. Sinclair had notified his

arrival to Stevens, head of the British Secret Service, to whom he had been told to report, and a meeting had been arranged at the hotel.

The two men had met before, and greeted each other warmly. Soon they were seated over a regal meal, for Stevens was no anchorite.

"How many years is it since we met?" said Stevens. "Lord, it seems an age. I often hear of your doings in the papers; you're getting right to the top in Scotland Yard."

"It may be so," said Sinclair, "but I often sigh for the old days in India, where we took our lives in our hands and got some excitement out of it all. England is too civilised, and the murderers there behave like young Wesleyan ministers for tameness. They sob in the dock and find religion in the condemned cell, and then bishops write sentimental twaddle about the fine ends they have made."

The other laughed.

"You haven't changed. But, talking about danger"—he leant forward and spoke in a low voice—"this job you are on is a pretty risky business. You see, the Rajah is immensely rich and has a number of secret agents. If he is found to have paid assassins to murder the man Ali at the Khotan, it means the end of his reign. Whoop! off he goes; and he knows it."

"They told me that much in London, but I thought——"

"Hush! not so loud; the band is stopping."

"You see," he went on in a lower tone, "the Rajah may have nothing whatever to do with it; that is our latest information. But it is believed that

the girl, Zania, was smuggled out of India after the murder of her father Ali, and hidden in a harem on the Bosphorus somewhere in Therapia. We are trying to trace her ; we seem to see the hand of this man Forester, who has been in half the trouble of India for the last five years, and if we could only catch this man the Indian Government will be immensely pleased."

" Then you think he may have something to do with getting the girl here ? "

" There are two theories. He may have brought her here himself, for his own purpose, as she inherits the whole of her father's fortune, or she may have been brought here by her friends to escape his clutches. Only, if they have the slightest suspicion we are on her track, it will be a bowstring for her, and into the Bosphorus, where so many have gone in past times."

" Do you want me to try and get in touch with her ? "

" That will be no use whatever. No European could do anything. We have a very clever little Armenian girl in our employment, who has got herself sold to a rich Turk in Therapia, and you know the gossip of the harems is extraordinary. She may learn the whereabouts of Zania."

" A bit rough on the girl, isn't it ? "

" Not a bit," said Stevens lightly. " We picked her off the streets, and she is well looked after."

" Then what am I to do here ? "

" You know, behind all this business there is this man who has kept himself carefully hidden, and we believe him to be the brains of the plot. We want you to try and find out something about him. Come into

the smoking-lounge, where we can talk without being heard."

They rose to their feet, and a man and woman who had been sitting at the next table got up at the same moment. Sinclair darted a lightning glance at them, for on occasions like this he was suspicious of everybody. The man was of a dark Southern type, probably Greek, he thought. He could only see the back of the woman as she went out.

Sinclair and Stevens talked earnestly together over their coffee, and, when Stevens rose to go, Sinclair said, " And when she is found, what then ? "

" Then you take a part. You must get her away to India, and co-operate with the Indian police on the spot."

" In the meantime I must just kick my heels ? "

" I'm afraid so ; but keep your ears and eyes open. I will send to you directly we have news ; but don't, for heaven's sake, call at my office."

As Sinclair turned quickly back into the hall, his eye caught the Greek of the dining-room knocking off the end of his cigar against a pillar.

He was a well-set-up man, with an athletic form, black moustache, and carefully brushed, glossy black hair.

Sinclair's wide experience had made him suspicious of any small incident, and he went thoughtfully to bed.

The next day Sinclair spent in reviewing some of the old familiar places in Stamboul ; first to the mosque of St. Sophia—always a joy to him.

He could never see this without a thrill of wonder at the beauty of the place, and his mind would

conjure up the marvellous pageants and the terrible scenes which had been enacted within its walls.

Sinclair was recalled from his dreams by a voice speaking in English, with a slightly foreign accent. " This is a wonderful place, is it not ? It is the first time that I have been here."

Sinclair turned, to see the man of the night before standing in an easy posture, leaning on one of the marble pillars that supported the great dome. If there was anything in his suspicions, it would be wise to know this man, but it might be that he was merely a chance visitor.

" You will excuse me for addressing you, I hope. It is a relief to talk to somebody. My name is Captain Frangi, of the Greek Army." He spoke with a slight drawl.

" Please don't apologise," said Sinclair with a smile. " My name is Fraser." This was the name he had given at the hotel.

" I used to know a Fraser in the English Army at Salonica. No relation, I suppose ? "

" Not that I'm aware of," answered Sinclair guardedly.

" Some day this place will again be a Christian church," said the Greek. " You know the legend ? "

Sinclair knew it well, but was anxious to learn more of the stranger. " What is it ? " he asked.

" You know, when the Turks broke into Constantinople, the frenzied populace crowded into this church ? They knelt in prayer for deliverance, while the priest stood at the high altar, celebrating Mass, to calm their fears.

" Then there came an ominous beating on the

great doors, and awful cries from outside, and still the Christian God gave no sign. At last the doors burst open, and a horrible massacre took place. The Turks rode the people down and slew them in the name of Allah." He pointed to the south side of the mosque. " They will show you a monstrous smudge on the wall there, which they say was made by the conqueror's thumb, red with the slain." He shrugged his shoulders. " Of course, it is all nonsense, but they say that then the wall opened and the priest went through, bearing the Sacred Elements. Then the wall closed behind him. The Crescent had triumphed over the Cross, but out here they say that when the Christians come again to worship, the wall will open again and the priest return to finish the interrupted Mass."

A look of anger came into his face. " We should have had it after the Great War, but you people stopped us. Come ; let us go."

Sinclair was interested in his companion, and felt that his suspicions were groundless.

" Are you going anywhere in particular ? " asked Frangi.

" Well," said Sinclair, " I thought of seeing the reservoir close here. I believe it is an extraordinary place, entirely underground and supported by immense pillars. It dates back to some remote time, and is supposed to be a reservoir, but no one quite knows what it was meant for. You can wander for miles in the darkness and not come to the end."

" That sounds most fascinating. Let us try it," said Frangi with boyish enthusiasm.

They made their way to the stone hut from which

one descends into the black depths. The attendant Turk looked doubtfully at them, and muttered something about a guide—it was dangerous to go alone. There were holes of unknown depth into which one might fall.

"Do you speak Turkish?" asked Frangi.

"Not a word," said Sinclair untruthfully.

Frangi addressed some words to the Turk, who answered him at length.

If they kept to the main aisle they would be safe. They should not go far, and must feel before them with their sticks.

"What does he say?" asked Sinclair innocently.

"He says that we must skirt along the left wall, which is a safe part."

Sinclair was amazed at the audacity of the man, and all his suspicions returned with double force. Or was it that he did not understand Turkish, and was trying to bluff? For a moment he hesitated. He was on Government service, and had no right to take unnecessary risks. But at least he would be able to know with whom he had to deal. He agreed willingly, and they went down the well-worn steps into the darkness below.

There were shafts driven down from above which gave a faint ghostly light, and the floor was littered with the refuse of centuries. The place must have been of immense height originally. Sinclair had been there before, and knew the pitfalls, but he said nothing of this to his companion. He had brought an electric torch with him, and kept this in his hand, the button ready for pressing.

They skirted the left wall gingerly, Frangi talking

incessantly. There was a nervous note in his voice, which might be due to fear or anxiety.

Sinclair was leading, feeling the floor with his stick at each step, when, on reaching forward, the stick touched nothingness. He paused. Some instinct made him turn swiftly and flash his torch full into his companion's face. In that instant he saw a look of devilish expectancy, and he fancied Frangi was making a swift movement towards him, but the sudden glare blinded his eyes. He gave a gasp, and clutched Sinclair by the arm.

" What is the matter ? You frightened me."

Sinclair's nerve was of iron, and he firmly pushed the other back, saying quietly, " There's one of these nasty holes here ; it's a bit risky. I think we had better turn back, and come again some other time with a guide." His voice was steady, but his mind was in a tumult. In that flash of light he had seen something strangely familiar in the face of his companion.

" Why didn't you say you had a torch ? " said the other, in a surly mood. " You would have seen the hole then."

Sinclair left him some yards away and returned carefully to the place. Even he shuddered as he saw an ugly hole right in front of him, into which another step would have pitched him headlong.

He picked up a loose stone and threw it in, and waited till he heard a faint splash echo from far below. His face was stern as he faced round.

" Not much chance for anyone falling in there. Fancy dropping into the black waters and swimming round and round in the darkness, perhaps badly injured by the fall."

The other said nothing.

" I think we have had enough of this, don't you ? As a joke it is all right, but a joke can be carried too far," said Sinclair.

Outside, he laid himself out to a difficult task. His own suspicions were thoroughly aroused, but he wished to convince the other that he had noticed nothing.

The daylight made them blink, and the air was sweet after the vault-like atmosphere of the underworld.

" Let's have some lunch up here in Stamboul," Sinclair said ; " unless you particularly want to go back to the hotel."

" By all means. I shall be delighted. And, after having led you into such a dangerous place, you must allow me to be host."

There was a touch of studied contempt, as though he had taken a frightened youth into a haunted house, which Sinclair would have resented at another time, but he had a deeper game to play.

At an excellent lunch, taken in a cool, shaded garden, with the island of Princapoo in the distance and the wonderful panorama of the Bosphorus below them, a game of cut-and-thrust took place. Under the guise of genial conversation each was trying to make the other commit himself to some revelation of his identity, and Sinclair, old hand as he was, felt that he had met his equal. When they rose to go, Sinclair was certain of three things. First, that Frangi was perfectly aware who he was ; second, that Frangi was an assumed name ; and third, that he had nearly found his grave in the underground reservoir.

The problem he had to face was whether to go straight to Stevens and disclose his knowledge, or to watch his man till he should make some mistake. It was a game after his own heart, and he decided to follow on these lines. Frangi seemed to be only too anxious to fall in with his plans, as he made one excuse after another to keep Sinclair with him. He suggested a visit to the howling dervishes, which only bored Sinclair. Well-trained devotees arranged themselves in a semi-circle, and began a droning, howling monotone, swaying their bodies with the rhythm of the tune. Gradually they worked themselves into a frenzy, and then one rose and threw himself headlong against the wall again and again. Another thrust a sharp knife through his cheek and another through his stomach, while yet another had nails driven into his head with a hammer.

It was all very wonderful to the tourist, but the fact that an entrance fee was taken at each performance caused the sceptic to think. Sinclair knew perfectly well that these men had been trained from boyhood in their particular stunts, and took no more harm in performing them than the sword-swallower or the contortionist.

It amused him to hear Frangi's comments, as he was quite certain he knew as much about the show as he did himself.

Back at the hotel, Sinclair thanked Frangi for his company.

" I would like to introduce you to my wife," said the other. " Will you be dining here ? "

" I am sorry, but I shall be dining with a friend," said Sinclair untruthfully. He had had about

enough of the man. "Another time I shall be delighted."

He had no plans, but it occurred to him to take a run out to Therapia to see the lie of the land.

It was late when he returned, and he went straight to his room. His long official life had made him methodical, and as he turned to his handbag, in which he kept letters and documents, he started. He was quite certain that the top document referred to a case on which he was working in England. There could be no doubt at all. Yet, when he opened the bag, the documents, although perfectly tidy, had been taken out and replaced in a slightly different order.

Luckily, he had carried on his person all matters of importance, and, if his papers had been tampered with, there was nothing to give any vital interests away. Only, of course, his identity would be revealed, and the thought vexed him.

He made certain careful preparations, and went to sleep.

## CHAPTER XV

## BARRATT'S MISSION

Stevens was having his breakfast at ease, and scanning his post-bag, when Sinclair was announced.

A look of vexation crossed his face, for he had been told that it was inadvisable for Sinclair to come to the official headquarters.

When, however, the detective entered, Stevens saw that some event of the gravest importance had happened, for his face was stern, and he had the appearance of a man who had not slept a wink.

"Sit down and have some food," said Stevens cheerily.

"A cup of coffee, if you don't mind, but nothing else. Stevens, I have some serious news to tell you. First, as to yesterday."

He proceeded to relate the happenings of the previous day to his friend. At the description of Frangi, Stevens gave a startled exclamation, and Sinclair stopped.

"What's the matter?"

"Go on; I'll tell you later."

Sinclair continued the narrative.

"When I found that someone had been at my papers I realised that matters were serious, so I carefully arranged a dummy in the bed exactly the shape of a sleeping man, and with the aid of a rug

made up a shake-down on the floor underneath the bed.

" I suppose I must have dozed even in that uncomfortable position, for the next thing I was aware of was a faint sound made by the turning of the key in the lock. You know I am a very light sleeper. I continued breathing deeply and regularly, as a man sunk in deep sleep. I could be sure that someone was in the room, waiting and listening, but I dared not move a muscle.

" Whoever it was came close to the bed ; I could feel his stealthy movements on the polished floor, and then on the thick rug by the bed. He paused, and seemed to be leaning over the recumbent figure, and then I felt a sudden blow, which caused the bed to give with a creak. I had presence of mind enough to give a deep groan, and the blow was repeated twice. Then someone moved rapidly away, and the door was locked. I was armed, but, in the position I was in, to try and crawl out would be asking for death, and the main question was not who had tried to murder me, but how best to turn this to our own use."

" One moment. I suppose you locked the door ? "

" Of course ; and bolted it. The assassin must have opened the door by turning the key with pliers—it isn't hard—and prised the bolt open."

" I see. Please go on."

" Well, I examined the dummy, and found my pyjamas riddled through with stabs of a knife. My best suit, too, which I had thoughtlessly used. I turned into bed, and had a good think."

" You're a pretty cool hand," said the other, laughing.

"Well, I argued it out this way. My friend Frangi was evidently at the bottom of all this. He knew who I was and what I was here for, and probably thought I knew more than I do. Well, if I roused the place and gave the alarm, he was not so simple as to be caught. Either he had done the deed himself, or employed some hired murderer, but, in any case, he would cover himself, and either I should have found him peacefully sleeping in bed, or he would have gone. It was obviously best to lie low. Then I thought of you, and determined on a plan.

"I stole out of the window and made my way by side-streets here. I thought if you went down to the hotel and asked for me, they would find the locked door, and you could summon some of your own men and go in. In your position, you could easily arrange to bring out a huddled figure, and give out that I had disappeared. The murderers will think you are concealing my death, and, you know, in a city like this things can be done which would be impossible in London."

"I like your scheme. I'll get off at once. They must not open the door till I get there. You must lie hidden here."

"Do you know the man who is at the bottom of all this?"

"From the description, he seems to be the very man we suspect of the murder of Ali—the man Forester. He must be a pretty cool hand. He was an officer in the British Army, but was cashiered, and took service with the Rajah of Bhipor in some capacity."

"And the woman? She seemed to be a Greek."

" Oh, you can't tell with a man like that. Woman will be his undoing." A sudden thought struck him.

" By Jove ! I wonder. She wasn't an Indian, by any chance ? "

" I don't know—I only saw her back, you remember, as she went out."

" It would be just like his cheek and his cleverness if it were Zania herself. If so, he's moving, and we have no time to waste. I'll get off. Wait for me here."

When Stevens returned, he found Sinclair still sitting where he had left him, deep in thought.

" Everything went well," Stevens said cheerfully. " I went and asked for you. The proprietor said you were not yet down. Then we went through the farce of trying to call you, and at last forced the door. It was as easy as shelling peas. The wretched man was scared out of his wits at the prospect of a scandal in the hotel, and was only too pleased to leave everything to me. So I brought your corpse down a backstairs and smuggled it out. I impressed silence on the man, who was only too glad to keep quiet.

" It appears that your friend Frangi had gone, with his lady, and I am pretty sure, from the description, that it is Zania he has got hold of, though she was disguised as a European. My men are at work now trying to trace them, and I have sent to get hold of our little Armenian and see whether she has any information. Here comes someone."

A knock at the door sounded, and an orderly entered and saluted Stevens.

" Any news, Jarvis ? "

" Yes, sir ; bad news, I'm afraid. The Turkish

police have found the body of a girl floating in the Bosphorus, and she has been identified as our Armenian agent."

"Poor soul! we sent her to her death," said Stevens bitterly.

"I am afraid there is no doubt of that, sir. She has no marks on her, and was probably drowned like a kitten. Perhaps they put her in a weighted sack, which has come open."

"Don't, please," said Stevens sharply. "You are certain about her?"

"Positive. I have seen the body myself, sir," said the wooden officer.

"All right. That will do."

When they were alone, Stevens buried his head in his hands. "I'm not hardened to this sort of thing. A man is a different matter. We never ought to have let her go. By God! That fellow Forester is a blood-thirsty ruffian. He's got something to answer for.

"Now we are at a loss. If he has really got the girl, he'll skip over to the Asiatic side."

"More likely stay here," said Sinclair. "It's far easier to hide in Stamboul than in London."

The two men looked at each other blankly; Stevens knew Sinclair was right. Sinclair resumed:

"Now let's think this thing out. Put yourself in the man's position. He's got some game on, that's obvious, and it's ten to one he's not acting alone. On the other hand, he's not the sort that will stand equals, or anyone who will interfere with his plans. His friend—if such men can be said to have friends—does not appear to be here; he would probably have servants. It's curious how a real blackguard can

get faithful service when honest men are often badly served."

"Probably he has Indians," said Stevens. "They're discreet and faithful, and would be far more useful here than Europeans."

"We have one thing in our favour—I'm safely dead. Now for disguise. This is like the old Indian days again. We never do this sort of thing in England. You can fix me up?"

"Rather! I believe you are enjoying yourself here, Sinclair?" Stevens said with a laugh.

A cloud passed over Sinclair's face for a moment. "Yes—if it were not for one thing——"

"Come and get anything you want," said Stevens, rising.

. . . . . .

Days had passed, Sinclair had gone, and no news had come of his doings. All efforts to trace the man Forester and his "wife" had failed, and Stevens was getting anxious.

It was growing dark in his office, but the view over the Golden Horn from his window was so entrancing in the gathering dusk that he hesitated to turn on the light. The terraced town of Stamboul rose shadowy and mysterious across the water, its myriad mosques and slender, lance-like minarets shrouded in a magic haze. Here and there twinkling lights came out. It was the time of Ramadan, the great Moslem fast, and soon great electric signs appeared across the face of the nearer mosques, bearing flaming texts from the Koran—incongruous enough, the old religion adopting the latest inventions of science. A purple mist rose from the waters, and, high up, the minarets of

St. Sophia stood up black against the sky. A droning sound—the eternal noise of a city—came through the open window.

Stevens could never have enough of this marvellous city of romance, intrigue, and wonder, which had stood inviolate for centuries, not through the might of its defences, but through the bitter jealousies of the Western Powers and the selfish greed of nations. "The Russians shall not have Con-stan-ti-no-ple" had been the senseless catchward of the music-halls some fifty years ago, as in recent years the Bulgarian Army had been sternly warned by Russia and Austria to call a halt almost at the gates of the city.

And the old Turk laughed quietly, as Abdul Hamid had laughed before, at the foolishness of the Christian Powers.

Stevens's thoughts were interrupted by a slight sound behind him. He turned like lightning—his life was one continuous danger—and instinctively his hand went to the drawer of his desk, where his revolver was always ready.

A tall Indian, bearded and turbaned, was standing motionless by the door.

Stevens knew better than to show any surprise.

"How did you get in here?" he asked sternly.

"I have news—of the Sahib Sinclair." The Indian spoke in smooth Hindustani, his arms crossed, and his hands hidden in the folds of his robe.

"What is your news?" Stevens asked in the same language.

The Indian slowly drew out a piece of paper, and, advancing to the desk, handed it to Stevens, returning to his place by the door.

It was a pencilled note in Sinclair's handwriting, and Stevens held it to the sunset glow, not wanting to switch on the light till he had read it.

"You may trust the bearer of this note, who will give you all the news"—that was all.

A smothered laugh caused him to look up. The next moment the room was flooded with light as the electric light was turned on.

"Well, if it's good enough for you, it ought to carry me through," said Sinclair.

Stevens laughed; the disguise was perfect, and, even in the bright light, the voice alone revealed the identity of the man.

"I'm dying for a smoke. Being Ramadan, and I a believer, I cannot smoke till sunset. In the bazaars the Turks are all fingering their cigarettes, impatiently waiting for sundown to light up."

"Sit down and tell me all the news," said Stevens, offering a cigarette.

"I miss my pipe," said Sinclair. "But disguise must go even to this extent. One false move and I should be detected."

"What's the news?" asked Stevens anxiously. "I've had a rather strong letter asking what we are doing since you've been away, and you can't keep dead much longer, you know," he added with a smile.

"Well, I'll tell you. I followed up that idea of yours that Forester had Indian assistants; it was the only slight hope we had. I went over to Therapia, and got into touch with all the worst type of the riff-raff of Europe and Asia—pimps and thieves who do every dirty thing for rich Turks for a few piastres,

murder being quite a small matter. By luck I found that two Indians had been haunting the place for some time—quiet, secretive fellows, who had just gone too far by being too free with their money—a great mistake with these ruffians.

" It appears that a mysterious woman had been brought here by these Indians and placed in charge of the lady of a harem, though with strict orders that she was to be treated with the utmost respect, and this alone had roused the curiosity of the place.

" A short time ago—in fact, the night of my arrival here—she was taken away, and rumour said that a European had come for her. It was all very vague, and, of course, there was much lying gossip which had to be sorted out, but I have found that there is a vile den, a cabaret on the outskirts of Pera, down by the Bosphorus, where the Indians are going each night, apparently waiting for someone. " I'm going there to-night."

" You mustn't go alone," said Stevens firmly.

" Oh, yes, that is essential. Any signs of police, or that the place was watched, would be fatal."

" I don't like it. Let me come too."

" Impossible. I'll tell you the address only if you promise to take no action. Of course, if I do not appear to-morrow, that's a different matter. Then you can act."

" And find your body in the Bosphorus," said Stevens grimly.

Sinclair laughed. " That's all in a day's work. I hope by to-morrow, if all goes well, to be able to lay my hands on the man, and the woman too. I must go now ; one cannot be too careful."

" You are armed ? You know, I don't like it ; this fellow is not only reckless, but a damned clever devil."

" I'll be careful. Till to-morrow, then."

With a swift movement Sinclair opened the door and was gone.

Stevens half rose to stop him, and then sat back in his chair, reading mechanically the slip of paper on which was the address of the place of meeting, which Sinclair had placed on his desk. It was written in Turkish, and for a moment Stevens wondered whether the whole interview had been some elaborate fake, and the visitor a cunning imitation. He was restless and uneasy, and turned savagely to his correspondence.

A sharp knock came at the door, which made Stevens start in spite of himself. He was nervous this night.

" Come in," he said irritably.

" A gentleman to see you, sir," said Jarvis.

" Who is he ? "

" He's come from England, and seems in a desperate hurry. Here's his card."

Stevens read the name—Mr. Arthur Barratt—and written on the back a note : " Please do what you can for Mr. Barratt," signed by Sinclair's secretary at Scotland Yard.

" Show him in," said Stevens, wondering what on earth this meant.

Arthur Barratt came forward, an anxious look on his face, and shook hands.

He plunged straight into the business.

" Mr. Stevens, is it true that Mr. Sinclair is dead ? "

Stevens was not to be drawn ; he hedged. But Barratt was a plain-spoken man, and the long journey had worn his nerve thin.

" It's a matter of life and death. I've come all the way out to find him. You've heard of the Littleworth murder case, I suppose ? "

To him it was a matter of stupendous moment, but in these remote regions one murder more or less did not carry much importance with it.

" I believe I did read something about it," Stevens began.

Barratt cut him short. In rapid sentences he told the story, and of Sinclair's part in the drama.

" Anthony has been sentenced to death, and I came out to see whether Mr. Sinclair could help," he concluded.

" Well, I hope Sinclair will be here to-morrow, Mr. Barratt. Meantime, you must keep this information to yourself, you understand. It's very important. You had better stay here with me."

" But can't I find him ? You don't know how urgent it is. Even now I don't know whether it isn't too late."

" Tell me," said Stevens, unmoved. " Are you a great friend of this Anthony ? You must be, to take all this trouble." He looked at the other man shrewdly.

Barratt showed signs of embarrassment.

" I'll be honest with you. My fiancée is frightfully upset. She thinks I am quite useless, and rather a fool, as far as I can make out, and asked me to come here. That's all."

" I see. Well, come and have some food, in any case."

Barratt rose impatiently. "I couldn't eat—I fed on the train, as a matter of fact. Mr. Stevens, can't I do something? Can't I find Mr. Sinclair somehow? Where is he?"

Stevens remained in thought. He glanced across at Barratt, summing him up. There was capacity and honesty in his face, and resolution.

"Can you shoot?" he asked suddenly.

"I? Yes. I had a commission in the war. I'm fairly good. Why?"

A plan was forming in Stevens's mind. He was anxious about Sinclair, but he had given his word not to disturb his plans by police interference. Here was a stranger who could watch matters without suspicion—he had "tourist" written all over him. With a reliable guide he could see the sights of the place, and might get information of the greatest value.

"If you really want to help," he said, "Mr. Sinclair will be at this address to-night. I can get you a guide who will take you there. It's a sort of cabaret where the very worst characters congregate, and for that very reason the sort of place that the English tourist likes to see. If you will promise not on any account to disclose yourself, you can go; the people there will think they know what you have come for. There are plenty of *them* there. Just let your guide stand drinks, and don't go too far—you understand?"

"Perfectly," said Barratt, his spirits rising with the thought of action. "I've been in some pretty shady places in most of the European capitals. I'll simply watch, and if I see Sinclair I won't speak to him unless he speaks to me."

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Stevens smiled. " You won't see Sinclair. That is, you won't recognise him, that I'll bet. Still, you can come and tell me what happens, and if he sees you he may speak to you."

" I'll just scribble a line to Miss Lake. No, it will do when I come back. I may have some news then."

## CHAPTER XVI

## THE CABARET

The place of meeting to which Sinclair had gone was outwardly similar to countless such places scattered over the capitals of the world. It had a Turkish name which no one ever used, and, with ironical compliment to the French nation, was called the Café de Paris by its habitués.

It was cosmopolitan, brightly lighted, and lavishly decorated. The tourist had a thrill of pleasurable excitement when he was told that half the murders and thefts of the city were planned here.

There were dancing-girls, and music of sorts, and the charges were extravagant. There was a gambling-room upstairs, and, if rumour spoke true, other rooms where nameless things occurred.

The Armenian Jew, who was making a large fortune from the takings, kept a staff of his own secret agents, who knew more about the police than the police knew of them, and its secrets were closely guarded. The Turkish police are complacent and venal, so that such unpleasant things as raids were unknown.

Barratt entered with his guide, who nodded to the porter at the door, a black of enormous size in a flamboyant uniform of red and gold, and a fez which clashed horribly with the scarlet. He knew all the

guides, and which of them were the most profitable to himself. This one—a pock-marked Turk with a squint—was always a source of revenue. Stevens had picked his man with discretion.

The guide ordered coffee and cognac to start with, and led Barratt to a secluded seat, where he could watch. Other fun would come later, he assured him ; the night was young.

Barratt, now that he was doing something, enjoyed the scene. He tried to make out the various types of all nations who made up the assembly.

There was an elderly Frenchman, chatting in friendly tones with a fellow-countryman whom he had found sitting lonely at a table.

He made no secret of his business ; he was in the carpet trade, for which purpose he had been to Smyrna, and even to distant Bokhara. Mr. Fleurbaix was his name, it appeared. He had ordered dinner, and, having tucked his napkin into his collar, poured himself out wine and water in the approved French style.

There was an obvious Austrian Jew with his good " wife "—probably a diamond merchant, Barratt thought—and a stout Bavarian of noisy habits, but genial and red, who got into trouble with his soup.

Across the room were a couple hard to place. The man was old, and seemed an invalid, for his left hand was useless. He was white-haired and querulous. With him was a golden-haired thing, all paint and powder—certainly not a daughter, and hardly a wife.

She was attentive, though not demonstrative, but she smiled at the old man in a rather frightened manner from time to time.

"Wicked old man," Barratt muttered to himself. "He ought to be thinking of his latter end."

And then two charmers of uncertain nationality descended on Barratt's table, and the guide ordered champagne, and told them emphatically that the stranger would not dance, and had come to see the fun. They wished him luck, hoped to see him later, and, having disposed of the bottle, went off as the band struck up a discordant jazz. One of the attractions of the place was that the music was supposed to be "Oriental," which meant that a collection of out-of-date and grotesque instruments jangled American music out of tune.

Barratt looked in vain for some sign of Sinclair.

Two Indian waiters, whose quiet dignity contrasted with the patrons, who were anything but dignified, were serving coffee—Turkish coffee, heavy with grounds—and cognac. The dancing-girls had reached the stage when they had marked down their partners, or victims, as the case might be, and were for the most part spending the time between the dances in happy conversations, knowing that their coffers would presently be filled.

It was all very interesting, but Barratt had not come to see a show, and somehow a fleeting vision of Madeline crossed his mind, and the thought of her face in such a place as this.

And then he thought of his mission. The Frenchman had finished his meal, and his chance friend had gone off with a dark-haired charmer for a dance

and a talk in some more secluded spot. He looked round, being evidently a sociable soul, and his glance fell on Barratt. He wore gold-rimmed glasses, and was evidently short-sighted.

Before him was the menu-card, a large affair elaborately inscribed. The Frenchman read the items with the avidity of a gourmet, and grunted. He gave his order to the waiter, a mixed Greek, who departed with a bow, skirting his way dexterously between the dancing couples. The Frenchman took a pencil from his pocket and appeared to be marking the card. He would look at an item, and then put it carefully down on the other side. It amused Barratt to watch him.

The band stopped, and the dancers moved to the shaded alcoves round the room, each half hidden by palms and screens, for the proprietor knew his clients. The Frenchman rose too, and strolled idly across the room.

As he passed Barratt's table he paused for a moment. " Monsieur has no card, I perceive," he said in broken English. " Permit me."

He placed the large menu before Barratt, and passed on with a smile.

Astonishment prevented Barratt from speaking—astonishment, not at the words, but a sudden warning gesture, unmistakable and instant, which the man had given.

He had sense enough to do nothing till the band had struck up again and the room was a whirling glitter of scantily clad women and half-intoxicated men.

Then he gingerly turned the card and read. He

did not know the writing, but guessed the identity of the writer at once.

> " Show no signs of any kind," he read, " and do not look up till you have finished. Do not look at me or in my direction. When you have finished, wait, and then put the card in your pocket. Do not tear it up here. Destroy outside. Whatever happens, on no account take any notice. There is grave danger here. I will see you to-morrow. Be careful. I can guess why you are here, and am anxious for news, but it must wait."

Barratt read it through twice carefully, and then, glancing round the room, slipped it quietly in his pocket. His guide had noticed nothing, being engaged in fencing with a Circassian girl who had marked Barratt down for a dance, and would take no denial.

The atmosphere was stifling, though windows were wide open and fans going. The turgid smell of scented bodies and tobacco-smoke mingled with the secret subtle smell of the East which haunts Constantinople, an acrid smell which there is no mistaking.

The Circassian had seated herself, and was already busy with a bottle which the guide had ordered. He must dance with her, she insisted. Was she not beautiful enough? She liked his face, and so on, with all the worn-out arts of her trade.

Barratt looked across furtively at Sinclair, as he knew him to be. He was toying with the trifle he had ordered, while an Indian was serving him with French coffee.

He swallowed the black coffee at one draught, and suddenly half rose from his seat. For one moment Barratt saw a mute look of appeal directed towards him ; the next, Sinclair had pitched forward across the table.

In an instant all was confusion—not that such a scene was uncommon ; there were many drunken men at times who were removed bodily in a state of stupor and nothing more, but sometimes ugly things had been done, and then a hasty exit was desirable. Besides, these moments gave an excellent opportunity for clinging to partners for protection, a trick which went down particularly well with American visitors, flattering both to their strength and their chivalry.

Barratt recalled in time Sinclair's emphatic words, and checked himself from rushing forward.

He rose slowly and joined the crowd which had gathered. The old man had hobbled up, leaning on the girl, and with a commanding gesture brushed the dancers aside.

" I am a doctor," he said in English. " Give him air."

The proprietor had bustled up ; he did not like such incidents in his respectable cabaret.

" Is monsieur ill ? " he asked.

The old man was bending over the prostrate man, who had been laid on the floor, and was feeling his heart.

" Monsieur is not drunk—he has not had enough." The proprietor spread his arms out.

" No. He is not drunk."

" He is not dead ? " the proprietor whispered fearfully, his face a sickly yellow.

" No, he lives," came the slow answer. " He has had a fit. He must be removed at once. No, brandy is the worst thing." He waved aside the waiter who had hurried up with a glass. " I will be answerable for him. Here is my card." He glanced round, and, seeing the Indian waiter, asked him to lift the man. Barratt sprang forward to help, and between them they carried him to the door, the proprietor following them with many thanks. One does not send for the police in Pera, and ambulances, like fire-brigades, are primitive, and always arrive too late.

They lifted Sinclair into one of those quaintly-waddling open cabs which even motors have not completely ousted. There were several outside, waiting for their accustomed nightly harvest, when the dancing was finished.

The old doctor thanked Barratt. " I am not much use now for lifting weights, but as a doctor I am still of use. Get in, my dear." The girl first helped the old man, and then got in herself beside the prostrate man, who was breathing heavily. The Indian jumped up on the box beside the driver.

Barratt was uncertain what to do. His connection with Sinclair was unknown, but he could not force his way in, even if there had been room, and, besides, Sinclair had been most emphatic.

" May I ask where you are taking him ? I would like to make inquiries," he asked.

" Why, certainly," the doctor answered. " Here is my card. I am staying at the Hôtel de l'Europe but I shall take him to the French Hospital—I know the people there."

The cab moved off into the darkness, leaving

Barratt a prey to doubt. His guide stood near, having quietly joined him.

"You will go back, sir? The night has only just begun—there will be much fun now."

Barratt took a quick resolve.

"No; get me one of those cabs—quickly. I want to follow that one which has just gone up the road."

"Certainly, sir," said the guide, and beckoned to a driver.

## CHAPTER XVII

## TRAPPED

Sinclair opened his eyes in a strange room. A certain drowsiness was with him. He was lying on a sofa, and his thoughts were confused. Standing before the door was an impassive Indian, gazing fixedly at him, motionless.

"Where am I?" Sinclair asked in English.

The Indian gave no sign.

Recollection was coming back to him. The cabaret, the strange appearance of Barratt, and then—a blank.

A sudden thought struck him, and he put his hand to his face.

It was smooth and clean-shaven, but for one day's growth. Gone was his wig and disguise. Of course—he might have known. So this was the end of his quest! To fail like a young beginner. Had Barratt anything to do with his humiliation? He recalled how he had met him in the train going out, with the Frenchman who had shared his berth—he was certain he was Forester—and into whose hands he was sure he had fallen.

He raised himself with difficulty, feeling giddy and sick. The Indian held up a warning finger, and rapped at the door behind him.

A man came in and stood looking at Sinclair

Then he broke into a loud and merry laugh, leaning against the door in an easy posture.

Forester—for it was he—advanced into the room, still laughing, and sat at the table, on which he placed a revolver. He was dressed in riding breeches and top-boots, a shooting-coat and a green waistcoat. He was a handsome villain.

"Well, well, well. I never thought to have had the pleasure of capturing the great Sinclair. Rather turning the tables, wasn't it? It only shows how the best of men make mistakes. And to think the poor French gentleman had a fit, and the good kind doctor fetched him out of the cabaret. Dear, dear, if I could afford to do it, I would let you go, to be a laughing-stock in Scotland Yard. How they would enjoy this story in the clubs!"

Sinclair knew that any sign of the humiliation he felt would only give his enemy greater joy; he asked quietly:

"How did you manage it?"

"That's the way to take it," said the other. "I knew you would be game enough. It's no good crying over spilt milk, but, Lord! how you played into my hands. Mind you, I take credit for some of it, but everything you did helped me along. Come, let's have a talk, for I suppose you realise you are dead as mutton. I should have finished you off before, but I couldn't bear the thought of your not hearing the story. It's too good to miss, especially as it's the last you will ever hear in this world, though I expect they've got some good ones where you are going."

He turned to the Indian.

" Fetch the *mem-sahib* in. Tell her his excellency is awake, and would like to see her."

An Indian girl of singular beauty, clad in native dress, entered the room. She had a timid, shrinking manner, and cast a glance of fear at Forester. It was easy to see she was completely under his dominating will.

" Let me present you. This is my wife—yes, properly married. She inherits her father's property, you see." His sneering tone roused Sinclair to a fever of hate. " You have heard of her as Zania, and seen her under different aspects, shall we call them ?

" I believe you came out all the way from England to find her, so you have your wish. Sit down, my dear, while I tell our friend all about it. May I smoke ? Zania, pass a cigarette to the worthy detective ; it's dangerous for me to go near him."

Sinclair took the proffered cigarette from the little hand of the girl, which trembled as she lit it for him.

" Really, you policemen are a silly lot. I wonder what they pay you for," Forester went on. " Needless to say, my name is not Frangi, nor am I a Greek I once bore a name—an honoured name."

A frown settled on his face, and he paused.

" Well, never mind that. Damn them ! I might have risen to great heights—I've got plenty of brains —but something went wrong ; we needn't talk of that. I was drummed out of the Army. I made up my mind someone was going to pay for that.

" I knew India pretty well, so, after a decent time had elapsed for the scandal to die down, I returned there, and entered the service of the Rajah of Bhipor."

" And betrayed his trust and murdered his servants," said Sinclair.

Forester smiled. " Yes, if you like to put it in that way : but I had other and more pleasing things to do." He glanced at the girl. " I knew the Rajah was after her, but I am a moral man, and was deeply in love." A mocking leer disfigured his face. " I had seen her beauty, and many other advantages, and I would have seen him in hell first. Luckily there was no need for extreme measures. Still, I think we got quits : your precious officials got buzzing around, and were sure there was some political scandal or other. Then, of course, there was the removal of Ali ; that was a pity."

" You mean Zania's father ? " Sinclair was revolted with the brute.

" Yes, it was foolish of him ; he tried to stop his daughter from a perfectly respectable marriage. Just like his cheek."

" Do you mean you murdered him ? "

" Well, I had help ; I had a pal, but no names. Not that it matters. All your stupid police thought it was a political assassination. Nothing of the sort—just a family affair."

The girl cast great tortured eyes at the man who was tormenting her.

" You murdered him," Sinclair persisted.

" I can't claim full marks for it ; still, I did my bit. I planned it very neatly, I think. But some fool got wind of it and nearly gave the whole game away. So I went to old England, and settled in Sussex for a time—nice peaceful spot."

Sinclair's heart beat quickly, but he showed no sign.

" The difficulty was, we hadn't got much cash, my friend and I. I knew as soon as the row was over I could claim the fortune of my young bride, but meanwhile we had to live. So he took a job as private secretary.

" I dumped Zania in Therapia, with respectable people." He grinned at Sinclair. " I knew she would be safe there. She would have been in the way in jolly old England.

" It may interest you to know that I attended a certain inquest, though not in these clothes. Ah, that interests you, I see.

" It was a silly business. You people will never learn."

" You were at Littleworth ? I don't believe you," said Sinclair, to draw him on.

" I really don't mind, but I saw you get that telegram, and followed you to London. I had been staying with my friend—you know quite well who he is——"

His intolerable conceit was wearing Sinclair's patience to a rag. He set his teeth and waited.

" I came by the same train with you the whole way, it may please you to know."

" I know that quite well ; you were the bogus Frenchman I met in the train."

" Good," said the other imperturbably. " I had a berth with your snivelling friend Barratt. God, if a man is going to be a villain, let him be a gay one."

" You think he is a villain ? "

" I heard him drivelling some confession to you ; I couldn't catch it all. He's a dull dog, anyway."

Sinclair was amazed. Barratt had been that very evening at the cabaret. He knew nothing of Barratt's help after his collapse, but surely Forester must have recognised him? What was the truth of the whole business?

"To continue our narrative." Forester was speaking. "I had two faithful servants devoted to me—here is one, and the other you saw at the cabaret. They had stayed at Constantinople to watch over my fair bride. On my instructions, they got her from Therapia, not without trouble. An interfering Turk had got his eye on her, and wanted to cut me out. He had to go to his Paradise, but it seems a pleasant place, so I don't suppose he minded. We faked her up as a European, with a wig and a paint-brush. You saw her at dinner with me.

"It was really laughable, the way you and Stevens put your heads together in solemn talk. I could tell exactly what you were saying. I can read by the lips quite easily. I nearly had you in the reservoir, but I give you best there. That was your trick.

"Your dying stunt was good, excellent, and took me in completely for the moment. I thought I had got you good and proper in bed."

"So it was you, was it?" asked Sinclair.

"Of course. I never leave an important job to a subordinate." There was real annoyance in his voice, and Sinclair marvelled at the man.

"Your friend just made one error. It wasn't your fault.

"His men carried the corpse down the stairs to the basement.

"One of my Indians was on the watch, since I had

left the hotel regretfully, and, I fear, without settling my bill.

" He came forward to assist, and, although ordered roughly away, was able to make certain no corpse was under the wrappings.

" Then I saw your scheme, though I had no idea what you were going to do.

" I knew you would go to Stevens, and had the place watched. I don't suppose you have been out of sight of my servants, night or day, since then. I could easily have had you removed, but wanted to see your game. Mind you, your disguises were clever ; they amused me. As a Frenchman you looked well.

" Then we gave you a rare Indian drug—you must know of it : it is effectual without killing, very useful when one wants to have a quiet talk afterwards.

" The rest you know. But the real cream of the jest is that your little plan of dying has acted well. It is given out that you were found dead, either murdered or had committed suicide, and I took care to have the news sent home. So you are as good as dead. One more death won't do you any harm. And, like Moses, your grave will never be found. Any questions you would like to ask ? Because the time is getting short."

" What happened to the Armenian girl ? "

" Oh," he said casually, lighting another cigarette, " she was getting hot. She found out that Zania had been got away from Therapia, and was going to report the matter to headquarters. That would not do, so, after I had disposed of you, as I

No

thought, I met her on the quayside, a very lonely spot, and—well—suppressed her."

"You fiend! You murdered her?"

"It's an ugly word; still, it conveys the truth. How did I know? Oh, Zania told me. She had been in touch with her, not knowing, of course, that she was one of your spies."

"I think you are the Devil. I've never heard such a cold-blooded confession of crime."

"No? Well, I'm afraid you won't hear another."

"Did you add the murder of Kitty Lake to your other villainies?"

"Wouldn't you like to know, eh? Not that it matters. But she will tell you soon, if you get to the same place by any chance. I won't satisfy your idle curiosity."

Sinclair glanced at the girl, and saw horror on her face, and loathing. It was evident that much of this was new to her. In a flash he saw that once Forester had obtained her fortune, which, with his colossal effrontery, he might well do, her chances would be negligible. And yet she was so completely under his dominating will that he was sure she would make no effort to escape from him.

"And now, Mr. Detective," said Forester, rising, and smiling still, "I've had enough of you. You know the whole story, but dead men—you are familiar with the proverb."

Sinclair looked him straight in the face. No one should see him shrink. He braced himself for death as the other lifted his revolver.

And then things happened with blinding swiftness.

There was a crash behind him, and the lattice of the Turkish window bulged in and fell in splinters. Sinclair turned his head by instinct, and two reports rang out together. The room was filled with smoke, and Sinclair knew no more.

## CHAPTER XVIII

## A RACE AGAINST TIME

"God ! we've cut it too fine." Stevens leapt into the room, and threw his revolver on the table. Barratt squeezed through the broken lattice of the window and looked round the room.

"He's got him—I'm afraid. Five minutes earlier —two would have done." Stevens was kneeling beside the body of Sinclair, humped on the ground behind the table. "No, I believe he's all right. That is to say, he's not dead. He's still breathing, and I believe the bullet didn't actually get him fair. He's bleeding like a stuck pig, though. What's the matter with you ? "

He looked up from the ground at Barratt, who was leaning against the wall, his face a pasty white.

"I'll be all right in a moment—I'm not used to this sort of thing, not since the war." He cast a glance of disgust at the distorted thing lying in blood, sprawling on the floor at his feet.

"Have a look at Forester," said Stevens coolly. "I think I plugged him all right ; I'm a pretty good shot."

Barratt conquered his weakness and examined the fallen man. One glance was sufficient. Stevens had made no mistake.

The Indian girl was crouched against the wall, silent and tearless, with great staring eyes fixed on the man who had dominated her very soul. The Indian had gone.

Stevens had no sentiment ; he had already used his handkerchief, which was inadequate. " Here, get some bandages—anything will do ; we must stop the bleeding." The bullet had sawn a groove across Sinclair's head ; whether the skull had been fractured or not he could not tell. Zania got up with a shudder, as though recollection had suddenly come back to her, and went out. She might have escaped—the two men were too absorbed to take precautions—but her spirit was broken. " Cover that thing up before she comes back," said Stevens. " And then help me carry Sinclair to the sofa."

Barratt made some effort to straighten out the dead man—after all, he was dead, who lately had been a living man, and Barratt was not a police officer ; he covered him with a rug, and went to help. The girl returned with a mass of muslin, which she handed to Stevens.

" We must get him to a doctor at once. Damn ! That Indian has slipped it. We shan't see him or his precious friend again. Never mind ; they were only tools ; that's the devil who plotted it all. Still, we ought to have had them."

" Look here," Barratt said. " Last night, when Sinclair had that ' fit,' this man said he was going to take him to the French Hospital. Is that any good ? "

" Just the place. I know the people there ; they're first class. Go and get a cab. You must take him.

Send my men along as soon as you can. I'll wait here and look after the lady, and that——"

"But suppose the two Indians come back? They may want to avenge their master."

Stevens grinned. "I wish they would," he said.

Barratt took Sinclair at an easy pace to the French Hospital, a fine building overlooking the Bosphorus, where warships were at anchor—ugly, squat brutes, suggesting ruthless power—and Scutari rose from the waters on the Asiatic side.

By using Stevens's name he obtained attention, and waited while the doctors made their examination. He paced up and down the courtyard, the waiting-room being too confined. Everything had happened so quickly. Only a few days before he had been talking with Madeline, and had been goaded into this wild expedition. Only yesterday he had arrived, not expecting any immediate results—perhaps a long search. And now he had found his man, saved his life, and seen death face to face.

For he had followed Forester's cab to its destination—an easy task, for Forester had been strangely careless for so clever a man.

Perhaps, being in close touch with the proprietor, he had been informed that there were no spies present, or he may have trusted to his own disguise.

Barratt saw nothing but Sinclair's destination, which, for all he knew, might have been a perfectly good one, but, after the note he had received from Sinclair, he felt doubts, and hurried at once to Stevens, who took a grave view of the matter.

They had come back, and, not wishing to interfere with Sinclair's plans, had carried out a careful

reconnaissance, with the result that they had located the room which, from the closely latticed windows, had been the women's quarters in old days.

Barratt had been for an immediate raid, but Stevens, the old police officer, was for information, and they heard much of Forester's infamous confession. And things had happened so swiftly at the end that they had been only just in time.

And here he was, walking impatiently up and down, while the man he had come for was lying unconscious above.

At last the doctor came. What a time he had been !

" Your friend will live." He was all smiles and politeness. " He has not yet recovered consciousness, and must have complete rest—there is always danger of concussion."

" But, good God ! can't I speak to him ? " Barratt asked.

" Impossible." The doctor spread out his hands. " Complete rest—he must on no account be worried. Perhaps in two days——"

Entreaty was useless. It was maddening to fail at the very last moment. Barratt sought Stevens, whom he found in high spirits.

" It's capital," he said, when he had heard Barratt's tale. " As long as he gets well, that's the main thing, and we have brought off a great show together. They've wanted this man for years, and it completely clears the Rajah. The girl has made a full statement. She seems positively relieved, though keeps on shivering, as though she thinks he will come back and haunt her. She'll get over it in time."

" What have you done about Forester ? "

" Oh, that's all right ; we are not in London here. I've seen the Turkish authorities and explained the whole matter. There will be an inquiry, but we are used to this sort of thing here. No, it's turned out very well. I am glad for Sinclair's sake ; he's a rattling good fellow."

" But Sinclair won't come out of it very well, will he ? " Barratt asked dubiously.

" Bless your soul, you and I are not going to say more than we are obliged—you don't know police reports. That's all right. Sinclair tracked the fellow down, and sent you with a message to me. That's my version. Then we all come in. I tell you, this will be very good news both in India and at home."

" I see," said Barratt, laughing in spite of his anxiety. It all seemed so easy, and, as Stevens said, they were not in England.

" We've lost those Indians, I'm afraid, though I've got men after them. The girl will be sent back to India with my report."

" But suppose Sinclair is unable to talk for some days ? "

" Oh, I'm sorry," said Stevens. " I'd forgotten. I've got some rather bad news for you, I'm afraid."

He drew out some papers from his desk.

" I've just heard from England. That man Anthony you were telling me about——"

" Yes ! What about him ? " Barratt leant forward.

" Has either been executed or just going to be," Stevens said casually.

" For God's sake tell me ! " Barratt licked his dry lips.

" Oh, here it is. The execution is fixed for the

fifteenth—the appeal failed." A glance at the calendar. "Tenth to-day. No, I'm afraid it's too late to do anything."

"Man, we must! It will drive me mad—coming out here—and Sinclair found—and unable to move or speak. We must do something!"

"But what can he do, in any case?". Stevens was quite unmoved.

"I don't know; very likely nothing; but there may be a chance. Madeline—my fiancée, you know—absolutely believes in Sinclair."

"Well, you must wait till to-morrow. I'll call up the hospital for you."

Barratt waited in an agony till Stevens had put the receiver down.

"Well, they say he's got away with it very lightly, but must have a complete rest. They won't hear of anyone seeing him. If there are no complications, I can see him in the morning—it would be better for me to go. Sorry, but there's nothing to do but wait. You must be pretty done up, anyhow. Why not turn in?"

Stevens, for all his cold manner, had a sympathetic nature, and had seen something of Barratt's nervous state.

That night was the longest of Barratt's life. In spite of the sleeping-draught which Stevens gave him, he tossed on his bed, periods of wakefulness succeeding nightmare visions. It was not that Anthony was such a friend—indeed, he did not particularly care for him—but he felt, worked up as he was, that Madeline would never forgive him if he failed in his quest, and would never believe that

he had tried his best. He knew, as a business man, that the world has only one standard to judge men by —success, however won. Failure is worse than crime.

Before Stevens was up, Barratt was round at his office—he lived in the same building—sending urgent messages to him.

It seemed an age before he appeared, and then coolly ordered breakfast.

"It's no good going yet," he explained. "They wouldn't let me see him."

At last he was ready, and they drove in haste to the hospital.

The doctor was pleased with his patient. "Monsieur your friend has a hard head, and is very strong; he is free from concussion, and there is no temperature, but he must not be disturbed unduly. Perhaps in a week—if there are no bad symptoms——"

"Can I see him?" Stevens asked quietly. "You see, there are certain facts I want—you understand; he was arresting a dangerous criminal."

The doctor understood; he knew Stevens.

Sinclair was propped up in bed, a bandage round his head, rather white but quite calm.

Stevens told him the whole story of the death of Forester in a matter-of-fact voice.

"It's an excellent consummation, and I think the Big Noises will be pleased. I expect, as soon as you can be moved, you will want to get back." Stevens watched him guardedly.

"Good Lord, yes—with all this business, I had forgotten. Of course I must get back. There's a very urgent matter."

Recollection suddenly came to him.

" What is Barratt doing here ? " He gripped the other's arm.

" Now, don't get excited, my dear fellow, or I shan't tell you."

Sinclair made an effort, and lay back.

" He came about a murder case—one Anthony."

" What's happened ? "

" He's to be executed in four days' time," Stevens tried to speak dispassionately.

" What ? " Sinclair leapt up, despite the other's protest. " Stevens, I must go at once. I can't stay a moment. When does the Orient Express go ? No, it's no good your saying anything. It's a matter of life and death. There's no chance of an aeroplane, I suppose ? "

Stevens marvelled at the usually calm Sinclair, and put it down to his wound ; but Sinclair was out of bed and dressing feverishly, in spite of his weakness.

" Get a taxi, man, and don't stand there ! Settle up everything for me. I'll send it you."

" Never mind that."

Stevens had caught something of Sinclair's excitement. He went out quickly, while Sinclair finished his dressing.

The doctor came hurrying into the room. " Monsieur is not going ? " he asked in alarm.

" Yes, I have to get back to England at once. Mr. Stevens will explain and settle everything."

" I am well acquainted with Mr. Stevens, but it is impossible. On no account must you move ; there will be complications."

But the doctor was left standing. Sinclair had gone.

The good doctor shrugged ; he had always known all the English were mad—this one a little madder than most, evidently.

Outside, Sinclair found Barratt and Stevens with a taxi.

They shook hands hurriedly and jumped in ; there was no time now for explanations.

" First to your office, to pick up our things ; then to the railway station." Sinclair leant back giddily on the cushions.

" I remembered your useful practice," said Barratt, producing a flask of brandy, from which Sinclair gratefully helped himself.

Stevens sent Jarvis for the baggage, with orders to hurry, and glanced anxiously at the clock.

The precious minutes were passing. " The Orient Express has either gone, or just going," he said. Sinclair groaned.

At last Jarvis appeared, and stowed the bags inside.

" To the railway station, for your life," Stevens told the driver. " Fifty piastres if you catch the Paris Express."

The man grunted, and started down the Rue de Pera at a breakneck pace. On the Galata Bridge they were held up by slow-moving traffic, and Sinclair ground his teeth. Stevens looked at his watch.

" I'm afraid you won't do it, old man," he said. " But, upon my soul, I'd like to know your story."

Sinclair tore out his pocket-book and scribbled a

hasty note. " Send that off for me," he said, " if I catch the train."

Stevens read it through, and a look of surprise came to his face. It was addressed to Boyce at Scotland Yard, and read : " Returning immediately. Ask Home Secretary to postpone execution of Anthony. Vitally urgent. Sinclair."

Barratt remembered his promise to Madeline, and handed Stevens a wire merely stating that he had found Sinclair and was returning with him.

" By Jove, old man," said Stevens, " this is going to be an exciting race against time."

The taxi shot forward with a jerk, and the driver, disregarding all speed-limits, raced through the streets of Stamboul to the railway station. The Orient Express was slowly moving from the platform when they arrived. Pushing the astonished official at the barrier on one side and shouting to Stevens to explain matters, he leapt into the last carriage of the train, followed by Barratt with the luggage.

He had an official pass which took him on any railway, so that luckily there was no need to get a ticket, and Barratt had his return. He threw himself, panting, into a seat in the observation-car, and set his mind grimly to face the long journey with what patience he could.

As soon as they had settled down, and had recovered their breath from the wild rush to the train, Sinclair turned to Barratt.

" And now tell me the whole story from the beginning. Try and recollect every detail—especially about the trial ; it may be vitally important."

" I'll do my best, but I have brought all the papers, so you can read for yourself. But won't you rest first ? "

Sinclair smiled grimly. " There'll be no rest for me —but don't worry ; I'm pretty tough. I've got the beast of a headache, but, thanks to my turning my head, the beggar only scratched me. By the way, Barratt, I'm sorry, in all this rush—I owe you my life. I am very deeply grateful." He held out his hand simply, and Barratt felt that all his trouble was amply rewarded, whatever the issue might be.

Bit by bit Sinclair learnt the history of the case, but, swiftly as the Orient Express travelled, it was all too slow for him. At times he would get restlessly to his feet and pace the floor of the corridor. Food he could scarcely touch. They passed through the wild country of Macedonia, over flimsy trestle bridges with the River Maritza flowing hundreds of feet below, and so through a long tunnel to the great Plain of Drama.

With a jarring of brakes the train came to a standstill, and Sinclair impatiently threw open the window. There was a large red flag in front of the engine, and beyond that a gang of workmen on the line. Sinclair got down and went forward to where the guard was standing, and inquired the meaning of the delay.

It appeared that there had been a heavy rainfall, and the embankment had subsided. It would take eight hours at least to repair.

With a stern effort of will he made his way slowly back to the train. He knew that if he went forward and exhorted the men to work, it would cause more harm than good.

At last the work was done, and the train moved on over the repaired part of the line at a snail's pace. The delay was heart-breaking to a man racing against time. At Belgrade, Sinclair dispatched wires for a special aeroplane at Paris, and for a car to meet him at Croydon ; it was all he could do.

The small-talk around him got on his nerves. He had read every scrap of news of the trial from the newspapers twice over, and moved restlessly about the corridor, and gazed with unseeing eyes at the wonderful scenery from the observation-car. Barratt was equally restless.

The officials at the frontiers seemed to be purposely causing delay.

At last the long journey was over, and the Orient Express swung into the Paris terminus. It was four o'clock, and the execution was fixed for nine next morning.

Barratt he left to come on by train with the luggage. They were to meet in London that night at Kenyon's house, where Barratt was to wait. Never once during the journey had Barratt asked Sinclair what he was going to do. His trust in him was complete.

## CHAPTER XIX

## THE LAST APPEAL

From the Croydon Aerodrome Sinclair went as fast as the motor could take him to Scotland Yard. He paused for a moment on the pavement, and then walked steadily up the stairs to Boyce's office.

" So you have come back, then," said the other, none too cordially. " Good gracious, man, where on earth have you been ? " He looked at Sinclair's bandaged head. " And what have you been doing ? "

" It's too long a story to tell now, sir, but you shall have it all. The case ended successfully. What about George Anthony ? "

" His execution is fixed for to-morrow morning. I got your cable and sent it to the Home Secretary, but really I don't know what on earth you mean. If you knew anything, you should have told me before you went."

A sudden suspicion came to Sinclair. " Did you cable to me, sir, as you promised, when Anthony was arrested ? "

Boyce looked confused. " No ; as a matter of fact, I did not. I did not consider it necessary. The evidence was overwhelming, and I did not see what good could be done by your coming back. Now I would like to hear all about your case in Constantinople. Stevens cabled the bare

news of the capture and death of Forester—that's all I know."

Sinclair was furious. "I will tell you presently, as I said, but I must see the Home Secretary at once."

"Oh, I see; you think you've made a smart capture, and are getting a bit above yourself," said Boyce with a sneer.

"Not in the least, sir, but can you arrange for me to see the Home Secretary at once?"

"At once? Is there so much hurry?"

Sinclair could have kicked the man.

"Immediately, if you will."

"Very well," said Boyce, in a surly tone, and picked up his telephone. "Get me on to the Home Secretary, please," he said, and laid down the receiver.

Neither man spoke till the bell tinkled. "I am Boyce, speaking from the Yard. Who is that, please? . . . oh Wells, how are you? Yes, the Home Secretary. . . . Oh, he's out of town, really. . . . Yes, it's rather urgent. . . . Sinclair has come back from Constantinople. . . . Yes, Superintendent Sinclair; he wants to see Sir John at once if he can. . . . No, it's about Anthony. . . . I see. All right, I'll tell him. Good-bye. What's that? . . . Yes, certainly, at the club. . . . Oh, yes, I think so. . . . I had it as a certainty. . . . Yes, both ways, of course. It was 33's this morning."

Sinclair waited in an agony while Boyce was discussing probable winners for the next day's racing.

"I am afraid you won't be able to see the Home Secretary," said Boyce, with irritating calm. "He's

gone to his country house. I daresay you could get him on the telephone."

"That's no good at all. I must see him, I tell you. He lives at Cobham, doesn't he?"

"Yes, somewhere round there."

"Then I'll get off at once. Excuse me. I'll come back to-morrow and see you and give you a proper report."

Boyce was seriously annoyed. He had hoped to have retailed Sinclair's adventures at his club, explaining how he had put him on to the track and had worked out schemes for him. He was about to protest, but Sinclair had fled from the room. His car was waiting.

"Drive to the Home Secretary's house at Cobham as fast as you can."

"Very good, sir," said the driver.

Sinclair never forgot that drive. He was weak from want of food, and his injured heard throbbed viciously. Grave misgivings filled his mind. After all, what had he got to go on? There was nothing tangible; only his unerring instinct.

The car drew up at a large country house, and Sinclair leapt out and made for the door. In answer to his urgent ring, a butler appeared.

"Is the Home Secretary in?" he asked. "I am Superintendent Sinclair from Scotland Yard, and the matter is very urgent."

His name had no effect on the wooden-faced servitor. "Sir John is out riding, sir," he said.

"Then I will wait. Here is my card."

The butler carefully scrutinised the card; he was taking no risks. "Will you come in, sir?" he said,

and ushered Sinclair into a comfortable morning-room, where a bright fire was burning.

Sinclair sank into a seat with something like a groan, and the butler was struck with his ghastly appearance. "Can I bring you anything, sir?" he said. "You look ill."

"Thank you," said Sinclair. "Some brandy, if you have it. I am done up."

The kindly man soon returned with the necessary stimulant, to which he had added a plateful of biscuits.

It seemed ages to Sinclair before he heard the sound of horse's hoofs on the gravel outside. The door opened and the Home Secretary entered. He was a genial man, more suited to be a country squire than a Cabinet Minister. He was not particularly brilliant, but conscientious and plodding, and, for a politician, honest.

He shook hands warmly with Sinclair, for whom he had a regard. "What can I do for you, Mr. Sinclair?" he asked at once.

"I have come, Sir John, about the Littleworth murder case."

The Minister's face hardened. "What about it?"

"Well, sir, I want to know whether you are prepared to recommend a reprieve to His Majesty?"

"Well, that's a cool request. I suppose you have some grounds?"

Sinclair felt his position more hopeless than ever.

"I am afraid I have no evidence that would convince a court of law. It is my own conviction. I was at Littleworth on the day of the murder, and I saw Anthony from the time he came to the cottage till

the next day, and at the inquest. I am some judge of character, and I am certain he is not the murderer, however black things may look. There is something behind it all."

"But the evidence, my dear fellow?" said the Home Secretary, with a note of impatience in his voice. "You cannot go behind that."

"I can't help that. The man is not the type that would come to the house and stay there after the murder without betraying himself. His genuine, unassumed sorrow, and the curious puzzled air he had, convinced me that he knew something."

"You mean that he is screening someone? But you don't imply that a man would go to the gallows for someone else's sake. It's done in novels, but not in real life."

"I am certain I am right," said Sinclair doggedly.

"My dear Mr. Sinclair, I hate these cases more than you can possibly do. I not only went over the whole evidence myself, but I called the Attorney-General into consultation, and you must remember that the case was carefully gone into by the Lord Chief Justice and two other judges at the Court of Appeal."

"Sir," said Sinclair, "I have served the State for thirty years and have never betrayed my trust. My record speaks for itself. I pledge you my word, my honour, and my reputation that this man is innocent, and that if you hang him you will bitterly repent it."

His deadly earnestness, and the emotion so unusual in Sinclair, shook the Home Secretary, and he moved uneasily in his chair. "But the evidence?"

" The evidence ! If I had been there I could have ripped it to threads."

" What do you mean ? " said the other, startled out of himself.

" I have read it carefully through on my way back from Constantinople. They said the crime was done by a left-handed man, and made a point of his great strength."

" That is so."

Sinclair leant forward and said slowly : " Did it never occur to them that they were all wrong ? They assumed the blow was delivered from the front. It was not. *It was from behind.* That was why the poor girl never cried out. The murderer came on her from behind her back, and got more force that way. That was why it was a right-handed and not a left-handed man who committed the crime. There goes one of your pieces of evidence."

" Why do you say that ? "

" Because I know. I saw the wound, and I have had some experience. She was probably sitting on the music-stool, and that is why the note I found was lying on the floor at that spot."

The Home Secretary started. " That reminds me, you stated at the inquest that you knew who the man was who came for the note on the night of the murder ? "

" I did."

" Then who was he ? "

" George Anthony."

" But, good God, man, that is the strongest piece of evidence of all. You have settled the matter now."

" Not at all. I should have stated what I knew, but I saw it would help to convict an innocent man."

Sir John moved restlessly. " Really," he said, " I don't see any good——"

" Wait. Haven't you all jumped to conclusions? You have assumed that Anthony wrote that letter to Miss Lake."

" Certainly. The evidence pointed emphatically to that."

" What did he say in his defence? "

" He said he did not write it."

" No."

" What do you mean? He certainly said so."

" Pardon me, sir, he never said anything of the sort."

" But I am sure. I can produce the papers."

" There is no need. He said he did not write the letter *to Miss Lake.*"

" Exactly."

" He did not say he did not write the letter. He was not asked."

" You mean—— ? "

" I mean that you are all assuming that he wrote to her. What if the letter was not to her at all? "

" But the girl who works there? She said——"

" She said that she had given a letter to Miss Lake which Anthony had asked her to deliver to her."

" And he denied it."

" Pardon me again, sir, he never did. He said he gave no letter for Miss Lake. He also said he did not know she was there until that day."

Sir John rose to his feet in perturbation.

"What are you hinting at, Mr. Sinclair? Have you something at the back of your mind?"

"Perhaps."

"Well, then, I will ask you straight. Do you know, or have you any idea, who the murderer was?"

"I have, but I haven't a shadow of evidence, and I am not going to say anything which would cause the arrest perhaps of an innocent person. You are all assuming that the same man who was responsible for the poor girl's trouble was the murderer."

"I suppose the balance of probability lies that way."

"It may be all wrong."

"Steady, Mr. Sinclair. You are carrying me off my balance. There are other facts. What about the footprints and the gloves, and Anthony's failure to produce an alibi?"

"Again you are assuming facts. Suppose Anthony did come to the house—what then?"

"You mean that he was actually the man who was in the room and yet not the murderer?"

"It is possible, but I did not say so."

Sir John paced the floor with quick nervous steps.

"Mr. Sinclair, you have shaken me. Not that I have any real doubts in my mind, but if there is the remotest shadow of doubt I cannot let the man hang. I will tell you something you have not heard. Miss Lake's mother and sister visited Anthony in prison, and have been to see me. Mr. Kenyon brought them to me and asked for a reprieve. He pleaded with me with great earnestness. People will say there is no evidence in this, but it is, to say the least, remarkable that the mother and sister of the murdered girl

should not only pardon him, but believe absolutely in his innocence."

" Then why not grant a reprieve ? Heaven knows, penal servitude for life is hideous enough for anyone, but when a man is once dead, nothing can bring him back."

" What am I to do ? I wish you had not come here to disturb my mind. It is horrible enough to have to do these things."

" I have never asked a favour of the Department in my life before, and you know I have no personal interest in the matter."

Sir John walked to the window and gazed at the darkening sky. Night was coming on, and the sombre gloom was in the room. In the garden the trees stood out black against the greenish glow in the west, and, as he looked, the clouds parted and the setting sun shot out a last ray like an accusing eye. He stood long in thought, and a shudder passed through him, while Sinclair watched him in suspense.

There was a sudden jerk of his shoulders, and he walked quickly to the door and went out. Sinclair sank back into his chair, and despair filled him.

There was a rapid step outside, and the electric light was turned on with dazzling brightness.

Sir John stood before him holding out a paper. " Here you are," he said, in a husky voice. " Take this to the governor of the prison. It is an order for reprieve. Mind, you have not convinced me, and I feel I am making a mistake from the point of view of justice, but you have shaken me, and I will not take the risk. No, don't thank me, and now go. I shall get into trouble enough over this."

He took Sinclair by the arm and hurried him to the front door.

There he held out his hand. With a curious break in his voice he said, " If I were ever in trouble, Mr. Sinclair, God send me a man like you," and he shut the door.

. . . . . .

In the gloomy, vault-like cell a light was dimly burning. The hour of ten o'clock had solemnly struck from the prison clock, and Anthony counted each stroke. Before another ten o'clock struck he would be dead and buried in a nameless grave.

Black horror seized him. His cursed imagination would not leave him alone. How often he had pictured this last night, with all its terrors. No one, looking at him now, would have recognised the handsome young actor who had been the idol of the stalls.

His hair was grey, matted, and unkempt, and there were drawn lines round his emaciated face. The two silent warders sat at the table playing draughts. They had tried to talk to him, in rough kindliness, and to persuade him to play, but he had lapsed into silence, and they let him alone.

The chaplain had been and gone, but was coming back. The good man had been genuinely pained at Anthony's obstinacy in not making a confession of his own accord on the eve of his going to meet his Maker, but had spoken simple words of comfort, and read to Anthony, and prayed with him and for him.

Now he was fighting alone with his thoughts. The flickering shadow on the vaulted, white-washed roof

took the form of a beam and a hanging-rope, and Anthony hid his eyes in his hands. Dead stillness reigned in the prison—the silence of death.

Death, yes, in the open, fighting for king and country, or even in old age with a long, well-spent life behind, but this—to have one's neck broken by one's fellow-men, as something unfit to live. And the shame of it all. The newspapers commenting on his firm step, and on his good breakfast, and making a special feature of the fact that he had made no confession.

And the waiting crowd of sightseers, anxious to see the paper posted announcing that sentence of death had been carried out. A horrible feeling was creeping round his neck, and he moved it impatiently, as though the rope were already there.

And then there was a movement outside, and the sound of a key turning. The chaplain, he thought.

The door opened and the governor stood before him. His face was stern, and he held a paper before him.

" Anthony," he said, " I have some news for you. The Home Secretary has advised His Majesty to grant you a reprieve, and you will have your sentence commuted to penal servitude for life."

Anthony heard the words as in a dream—he supposed someone was mocking him—and then he fainted away.

## CHAPTER XX

## ARTHUR AND MADELINE

Madeline Lake was on her knees in the sitting-room of their flat. She had been there all night, without sleep or rest, though she had persuaded her mother to lie down. The awful shadow grew blacker as the hours sped on, until the first streaks of daylight filtered in through the drawn blinds.

" Nine o'clock ! Nine o'clock ! " was beating into her brain with the ticking of the little clock on the mantelpiece.

For all her pluck she had not been able to face another visit to the condemned man, but had written a long letter of farewell—a brave letter assuring him of their steadfast belief in his innocence.

With startling suddenness a ring came at the door, and Madeline put her hand over her heart at the instant shock. She rose, trembling, and staggered rather than walked down the little passage and opened the outer door.

Arthur Barratt stood outside, panting and dishevelled. He seized both her hands in his, and said with intense emotion : " Madeline, control yourself. I have a surprise for you. A reprieve was granted last night."

She would have fallen, but he held her fast and drew her into the room.

" What does it mean ? " she whispered. " Have they found the murderer ? "

" I am afraid not. That was too much to hope. But his life is spared."

" Thank God ! " she said, and burst into tears. The tension had been too great.

Arthur waited until she was calmer, and then sat beside her. " You must understand," he said, " that it is only a reprieve. He will go to penal servitude for life."

For a moment the relief had been so great that she had not grasped this fact, and the sudden realisation came as a shock.

" How awful ! " she said.

" While there's life there's hope. Remember, the truth may come out."

" I pray to God it may. But do you—you believe, then, in his innocence now ? "

" I do," he answered gravely. " I ought not to have doubted, but your terrible accusation against me made me anxious to believe otherwise. The trial was so convincing."

" What has made you change your opinion ? " she asked, in wonder.

" The man who saved George's life—Sinclair."

" Oh, of course. It was good of you to send that wire. You brought him back with you ? "

" I found him in Constantinople. It's a long story. We came back together. He went straight to the Home Secretary. It was he who got the reprieve."

" Then surely he must know something ? "

" He has told us nothing. He went straight to the prison with the order for reprieve, and then came to

Mr. Kenyon's house, where we had arranged to meet. He is quite done up, and has a nasty wound. Only his iron nerve has kept him going. He's wonderful. I've never admired a man so much in my life."

"You saw Mr. Kenyon, then?"

"I found him completely broken down—in fact, almost crying. He seemed to feel it terribly."

"I can quite understand."

"He wanted to go right away to the Home Secretary, and had actually ordered his car at that time of night, or, rather, morning, when Sinclair arrived with the news."

"Oh, I knew if Mr. Sinclair had been here this would never have happened; he is so clever."

The reaction after the terrible strain of the last few days had caused a feeling of relief so great that Madeline was almost light-hearted, and turned warmly to Arthur for news.

"Do tell me all about your journey. It was wonderful, bringing him back."

"It was good luck more than anything else," Barratt answered, and told his tale quite simply, while Madeline listened with shining eyes.

She remained lost in thought when he had finished, and he was content to watch her profile, and the aureole of gold round her head as the morning sun shone on her hair. At last she spoke.

"It's all so strange, Arthur. Before this tragedy happened we were just leading ordinary lives, like anyone else. We had never had a real trouble, except my father's death, and we were young then. I suppose I took life as most girls. I was fond of all

the jolly things—you know, dancing, and nice clothes, and so on. And you and I had got engaged. Oh, it's so hard to explain. I mean, we were very fond of each other, and should have got married in time."

He looked at her in astonishment. She had never spoken like this before.

" And then came this awful murder, and we really had to face something we had never done before—horror and pain and loss. Oh, I know. Some few years ago every woman and girl in England did the same, during the war. But since then things have been so secure, so settled ; only the anxiety about money, and the continual struggle everywhere to live somehow. Then came the arrest of an innocent man. I know you thought I took that to heart too much ; you were even jealous of George ; but if it had been you it would have been far worse."

" And yet——"

She stopped him. " I know ; I was mad. The whole thing had upset me so. And I'll be quite truthful with you, Arthur. We must refer to this now, and then we can forget it. You seemed—forgive me—so indifferent, and so—useless. I almost came to despising you.

" I thought of you as the hard business man, just locked up in making money and in buying and selling. I forgot you had served in the war. And then you undertook this mission, and have done so splendidly. You saved Mr. Sinclair's life, and brought him back."

" I'm afraid I didn't do much."

" Oh, I can tell, even from what you tell me."

There was a light in her eyes he had not seen before.

" I'm glad you've said what you have. It's all quite true. I feel years older, and this suffering has made something of me. Madeline, I thought I had lost you."

Her restraint gave way then.

" Forgive me, Arthur. I was wicked. I will never doubt you again."

The dark shadow which still hung heavy over them seemed to stand between them and prevent any outward display ; the moment was too sacred for that. He took her hand in a firm grip, and Madeline understood. The tears stood in her eyes as she gently disengaged her hand and rose with a happy smile.

" We are selfish, dear ; we must tell mother. She is lying down, fully dressed."

" There is no need, my dear." Mrs. Lake came into the room. " I heard you speaking, but you did not see me, so I withdrew. I thought you would not want a stupid old woman in the room."

" Mother dear," said Madeline.

" You must have some breakfast, Arthur," Mrs. Lake said in a kindly voice.

He passed his hand doubtfully over his unshaven chin, and then laughed at Madeline, who turned quickly to hide her face, and went into the little kitchen.

" Arthur," Madeline said, when they were seated round the table, " all through this awful night, which I shall never forget as long as I live, I could only think of one sentence from the Litany which beat into my brain : ' And to show Thy mercy upon all prisoners and captives.' I would like to have that

written up over every court of law and prison in the country."

"I agree," said Arthur. "But what mercy could be shown to the real criminal, who has not only committed this crime, but would have allowed an innocent man to go to the gallows in his place?"

Madeline's face hardened. "It is hard, I know. We say vengeance belongs to God, but who knows? He may be enduring worse suffering than we know."

"Madeline, you are too generous. If you had seen that man Forester, and heard his cold-blooded confession of murder, you would have no sympathy with that kind of man."

"And yet, you see, even there justice found him out, and he has gone to his account." She shuddered at the evil thought.

For a moment a shadow seemed to have fallen across the room.

Mrs. Lake broke the silence.

"I have been thinking a good lot lately about you two. I'm afraid I've been rather selfish. We have all had a terrible lesson. I would like to see you married. Of course, in the circumstances there cannot be any festivities, but I know you would not wish for that. I am sure it would have been Kitty's wish."

The blushes, which had been absent so long from Madeline's face, came in full flood.

"I'll leave you now, my dears, and you can talk it over. I'm only an old-fashioned old woman. You both belong to a new generation. You'll find happiness together, and in time get back to the old gaiety which seems so far away."

She left them, and he took Madeline in his arms, regardless of a broken cup which fell on the floor, and of the cat which looked its disapproval from the hearthrug.

Only the thought of the man who would be hurried off to a living death in a convict prison spoilt their perfect happiness.

But youth is optimistic, and hope still called to them to wait for the end to come.

## CHAPTER XXI

## HUNTER'S STORY

In spite of his iron constitution, Sinclair was forced to give way to doctor's orders and to retire to bed. It was three days before he was able to present himself before Boyce with a full report on the Indian case. The latter read it carefully through, but, with the selfishness of a petty mind, he had no congratulations for Sinclair.

"I notice," he said, "that no reference is made to this Department, which lent you to the Indian Government—or to the advice I was able to give you," he added with colossal untruth.

"I am sorry, sir," said Sinclair. "I can assure you it was not done intentionally."

"I daresay not," answered Boyce irritably, tossing the report on one side. "But there is another matter about which I must speak to you. You went to the Home Secretary and induced him to grant a reprieve to Anthony. What you told him you have not been courteous enough to impart to your own Chief. Not to put too fine a point on it, you have made us all look pretty good fools. Either our evidence was rightly founded, in which case the man was guilty, or it was wrong, in which case you should have put us right. It looks as if the truth will never be known now."

" I know. I have thought a good deal over it, and have come to the conclusion that the only honourable course for me to take will be to resign and retire on pension."

Boyce was startled. He had not expected that. What he had desired was an apology from Sinclair which would satisfy his pride, and perhaps a few hints on which he could make some startling announcement.

" I do not see any need for such an extreme course," he said.

" Yes, sir. I am getting old. I shall resign, and perhaps spend my time in trying to solve the Littleworth case."

" I understand," said Boyce in anger. " You want to go out in a blaze of glory, and if you find out anything by yourself you will show up this Department and take all the credit."

Patient as he was, Sinclair was stunned by this unjust accusation.

" That is most unfair, sir, and you know it. I have never taken any credit even when I could have done so. In nearly every case you have got all the kudos when we were successful, and when things have gone wrong I have shouldered the blame. If you prefer it, we can refer the matter to the Chief Commissioner."

" By no means," said Boyce, now thoroughly frightened. " My dear fellow, you must do what you think best, but don't act hastily. Take your time."

Sinclair went out without giving a definite decision. Darkness was coming on as he strolled through

the streets, watching the stream of life which passed him. His had been a lonely life, and he dreaded the time when his work would be over and nothing but his club would be open to him.

He shuddered at the thought of the garrulous old men who would buttonhole him there and distil small talk by the hour.

Toothless old men who ate tea-cake and swallowed cup after cup of tea, growing ever more talkative and quarrelsome in the process. Fancy if he became as they.

" Art thou become weak also as we are ; art thou also become one of us ? " he could picture them saying, glooming at him through their horn-rimmed glasses.

His sombre thoughts were interrupted as he found himself at his own door. He inserted the key and entered, and a curious sense of something impending was strong with him.

The old Irishwoman who looked after his flat came forward from the kitchen. " There's a man waiting for you, sor. He's bin more'n a hour. Oi locked him in the room."

" Who is he ? " asked Sinclair, smiling.

" He wouldn't give a name, sor."

Sinclair turned the key and entered the room. A man rose at his entrance, and stood cap in hand. For a moment Sinclair was at a loss.

" Good evening, Mr. Sinclair. You know me— 'Unter."

Sinclair took the proffered hand.

" Yes, of course ; Mr. Kenyon's chauffeur. Sit down, Hunter."

The man seemed ill at ease.

"Thank you, sir. I ain't Mr. Kenyon's chauffeur any longer. I got the sack."

"What was that for?" Sinclair offered the man a cigarette, and lit his own pipe.

"I dunno," said the man sullenly. "Something I said at the inquest, I suppose. Captain Farrar come to me, and says Mr. Kenyon was annoyed because I 'ad driven Miss Lake, poor gal, to the doctor. I couldn't 'elp it, could I?"

"Certainly not. So it was Captain Farrar who dismissed you?"

"Yus. 'E always used to pay me, and 'e give me a month's money. Since then I've 'ad no work."

"And is that the reason you came to me?" asked Sinclair.

The man's manner became confidential, and he drew his chair closer.

"No, sir, but there's strange things going on—mighty strange."

"Yes?" Sinclair waited for the other to get on with his tale; he knew men.

"About this 'ere disappearance of Mrs. Kenyon, sir."

"Well, what about it, Hunter?"

"What d'yer think yourself, sir, if I may be so bold as to ask?"

"Well, it's all very mysterious, isn't it?" said Sinclair with a smile.

"Umph. I might be able to tell you something of interest."

"You mean if I make it worth your while?"

The man shuffled uneasily. "We gotter live, Mr. Sinclair."

"All right, if your information is worth anything, you shall be rewarded. You know there is a reward out for anyone who can find her?"

"That's it, governor. Yer see, when a bloke like me gives any news, so to speak, 'e doesn't often touch the dough. Some 'igh-up person gets it."

"You may trust me. I will treat what you say in confidence."

"That's good enough. Well, you see—you know the cottage where the murder took place? O' course you do. Mr. Kenyon left it empty, and won't go near it. *But others do. See?*"

"What do you mean?"

"It's like this. I used to stop at a farm not far away. Nice people they was, though country bred and slow. Anyhow, when I was out of a job, I 'appened to remember I'd left some togs there. I suppose rightly they weren't mine—they was my uniform—but I didn't think Mr. Kenyon would want 'em for another chauffeur; 'e never asked for 'em. So I went to get 'em, thinking they might fetch a shilling or two. Mind you, I'm telling you this between ourselves."

"Quite right," said Sinclair.

"I got the clothes—the people had kept them for me—and in the pocket was the key of the shed what we used as a garage, near the farm'ouse."

"One moment. Was that the only key?"

"No. Captain Farrar 'ad another. Well, the farmer, Mr. Noakes, says to me, 'Unter, d'ye know whether these people are coming back, 'cos that

shed's still locked up.' So I told 'im they'd gone, and I would unlock the shed for 'im.

" When I goes there, Mr. Sinclair, what yer think I found ? "

" I can't say," said Sinclair, letting him get on in his own way.

" Nothing much to an inexperienced man. But I knows me trade."

He winked confidentially.

" There was marks of a car—recent, they was—and a bit of rag inside covered with fresh oil. What d'you think of that ? "

" You are quite sure ? "

" No doubt about it. I says nothing, but I asks the farmer discreet like. 'E couldn't tell me nothing, 'cept that the cottage was 'aunted. Of course, I don't believe that bosh. But, Mr. Sinclair, *there's someone there.*"

He paused to let the point get home.

" I kept a watch, but they're clever. One night I sees a man on the road. 'E disappeared into the woods. It was dark, but I see 'is figure a moment. 'E was a 'unchback."

" A hunchback ? "

" That's so. Slipped into the wood, 'e did."

" And if there's someone in the cottage, who do you think it is ? "

Hunter had edged quite close to Sinclair, and prodded his knee with his finger in his excitement.

" I don't think ; I knows."

Sinclair waited.

" I'm pretty sharp, Mr. Sinclair, 'Oxton born and bred, and I says to myself : If they been using this

shed for a car, and doing something at the cottage —mighty close, mind, for they give no signs of life— there's some secret here. One thing's certain, I says, they can't live without vittals. So I locks the shed and ties the lock with cotton—a padlock it was."

"You ought to have been a detective," said Sinclair.

"'Twern't no good ; they didn't come agin, and I couldn't stay, but I thinks to myself, Now, how do they get food ? Then I remembers that potty gal as used to come round and 'elp. Sarah, 'er name was. So I slips round to 'er 'ome, a cottage across the fields. She weren't there—no one, 'er mother being in the 'ospital and 'er father at work. I was a-strolling back towards 'The Nest,' past the old pigsties, when I sees something run inside, bigger than a dog. There ain't no pigs there now, so I 'ad a look, and there, sure enough, was the gal, a-hiding inside. I lugged 'er out. Near crazed she was, and crying. 'Don't 'it me,' she says. 'I ain't doing no 'arm.'

"I says, stern-like, 'Just you tell me what you're doing,' but she wouldn't say nothing. Then I says, 'Who's living at the cottage now ? ' She seemed sort of muzzy, and says, 'Why, Miss Kitty, of course.' It fairly gave me the creeps. 'Why, you boob,' I says, 'Miss Kitty is dead—months ago ! ' She looks at me all dithered up, with 'er mouth 'alf open. 'Well, she's there ; I takes 'er food.'

"That's all I could get out of 'er. Now, Mr. Sinclair, I asks you, if there's a woman there, sure as fate it's Mrs. Kenyon, a-hiding for no good purpose neither."

So here it was at last.

" And is that all ? " Sinclair asked.

Hunter seemed disappointed.

" I thought you'd be pleased, sir. Don't you think I'm right ? "

" I am not saying anything. Do as I tell you. Say nothing to anyone about this. Return to Littleworth and keep your eyes open. Here is money. Don't go to the farm or to the cottage ; you'll only be spotted. Hang about Littleworth looking for work, and keep your ears open. I shall be down there, probably to-morrow."

" All right, sir, I'll do it. Thank you kindly." He took the proffered note and spare silver which Sinclair held out. " Good night, sir ; you won't forget about that reward, will you ? "

When he had gone, Sinclair sat smoking for some time, only moving to refill and light his pipe. He was deep in thought. Presently he rose, and went to his desk, where he wrote a letter, carefully read it through, and addressed it.

Then he drove to Kenyon's house.

" What do you make of it all ? " he asked, when Kenyon had heard his story.

" It seems incredible. What on earth should she be down there for ? If it's true, it means she's alive, thank God, that's one thing. What are you going to do ? "

" I'm going there. It wants investigating, even though it may be all moonshine and rumour."

Kenyon started up. " Then let's go at once. I'll come with you. Any slight clue is worth following."

Sinclair remained impassive.

" I don't think we can go to-night," he said. " I have several things I must do, and there's no immediate hurry."

" No hurry ? Why, my wife may be in danger. It's easy for you to take it calmly."

" No, Mr. Kenyon, if she's been there some time, there's no call to suspect she is in danger. A hasty move might upset everything. Leave it to me. To-morrow we will go together, if you like—or, better still, I will go on and you can join me. We will meet at the ' Ivy Bush.' "

" I will be guided by you," said Kenyon, sitting down again. " It was good of you to come to me, but you can imagine my feelings after all this time. I had almost feared——"

" Mr. Kenyon," Sinclair said suddenly, " where is Captain Farrar ? "

Kenyon started. " Captain Farrar ? What do you mean ? That he——"

" I am suggesting nothing. I only asked. '

" You remember that I gave him leave of absence for two months. At the end of that time he reported for duty, but he appeared—well, let's call it dissipated. I wouldn't take him on again. I felt sorry for the poor devil, and gave him a fairly decent sum instead of notice, and sent him off."

" Then you don't know where he is now ? "

" I haven't the faintest idea, and I don't see that he could have had anything to do with this. His only object could be to get something out of me, and I haven't heard from him."

" Then you think that, if Mrs. Kenyon is there at the cottage, it is against her will ? "

"Mr. Sinclair, you're not suggesting that my wife is hiding from me?" Kenyon half rose from his place, but Sinclair held up his hand.

"Let's refrain from speculations. There may be another reason."

A frightened look came to Kenyon's eyes. "You are not hinting that he——"

"Let's wait. I'll tell you what I have done. Before coming here I wrote to the Chief Commissioner, resigning my post."

"Whatever for?"

"I meant to take that step in any case, and I feel I would rather be free to follow this matter up."

"That's good of you. I feel sure you will get to the bottom of it, if anyone can."

"Well, then, to-morrow. Better say lunch-time."

When Sinclair got back to his flat, a figure emerged from the shadows and came towards him. Sinclair recognised his visitor of the evening in the circle of the street lamp.

"Well?" he asked.

"I came back, governor. You remember I told you I found an oily rag in the shed—fresh oil it was? When I left you, I remembered I 'ad it, so I brought it along. It ain't a rag; it's a 'andkerchief."

"Thank you. It may be useful," said Sinclair, holding out his hand.

"But look, governor, there, in the corner." There was a note of intense excitement in the man's voice.

Sinclair took it to the light. Plainly visible, though smudged with oil, was a name.

"At last—so that's it. We've no time to lose," Sinclair muttered. The name he read was "R. E. Farrar."

He went to his telephone and ordered his car.

## CHAPTER XXII

## THE HAUNTED COTTAGE

In the night Sinclair kept his lonely vigil, crouching in the wet undergrowth. The woods were hushed. A deathlike stillness lay over the countryside. One by one the lights went out in the scattered cottages in the valley below.

Fitful gusts of wind sprang up from nowhere, and died down suddenly, and from time to time a gibbous moon shone through the cloud-wrack and shed a white light on the dead face of the cottage.

Sinclair moved his stiff limbs, and shivers passed through him. He strained his ears for any sound. Not a beast stirred, and then, far off, a dog began howling in long, melancholy gusts of sound.

Was it useless to wait? Were all his speculations wrong?

The croaking of frogs came up from the stagnant pool below.

Suddenly a faint sound came to his ear, so faint that he would not have heard it but for the fact that he had been expecting it.

It was the lifting of a latch. He darted one anxious glance at the sky, and breathed a sigh of relief as he saw a silver moon appearing over the cloud-bank. He gripped his revolver tightly, and waited. Before him was the dim outline of the French windows, and they were slowly opening.

What thing was coming from that crime-haunted room?

Two men emerged, one heavily muffled in a cloak, with his hat drawn over his eyes; the other stood in the doorway. They whispered together, and Sinclair caught no word. Then the muffled man stole across the grass plot diagonally, and at the same moment the moon came out.

The direction he took would bring him into the wood some distance from where Sinclair was hiding, and he dared not move.

The moon shone for a moment full on the man at the door, and Sinclair saw a bearded face and hunched-up figure, almost deformed, shading his eyes from the sudden light.

The next moment he had stepped back into the doorway, and Sinclair heard the latch closed with a snap.

The dark woods had swallowed up the first man; only the faint sound of breaking twigs told of his passage.

Sinclair rose hurriedly, and crossed the grass as fast as his cramped limbs would allow him, and climbed a fence into the road. The rain had made the surface slippery, and the mud clung to his boots, while the need for silence hindered him.

At the bend of the road he saw a dark shape standing, and at the same moment the harsh sound of a self-starter broke the stillness. He stood stock still as the car moved off into the night, and then took his way with what speed he could to Littleworth and bed.

. . . . . .

" I tell 'ee I see it plain as life."

" Nonsense. It's your nerves as is troubling yer."

" Orlrite, 'ave it yer own way. I bet yer a couple a' bob yer won't go an' spend a night there."

" Why not ? 'Tis all damn foolishness. There ain't no such thing as ghosts."

Sinclair was listening with interest to the conversation which was taking place on a bench just outside the smoking-room of the " Ivy Bush." Another voice now intervened, evidently anxious to save a quarrel.

" 'Ow did it 'appen, Bill ? "

" Oh, I'm not goin' to tell ye to be laughed at."

" Who's laughin' at yer ? Let's have the yarn."

" Well, I was a-comin' 'ome from Ketworth last night. I allus takes the short cut across the fields, not likin' to pass the cottage, as you can well understand, but it be so powerful mucky I thought I'd risk it. When I gets near, I sees a man a-creepin' down the path, an' I thinks to myself that be queer, with no one in the cottage, and I thought I'd see what he was up to."

" You was mighty brave then, Bill, all of a sudden ? "

" Orlrite, I ain't goin' to tell you nothin' more." There were sounds as of quarrelling, and the men were about to separate when another voice intervened—a strong Cockney voice, different from the Sussex burr. " 'Ere, don't get so ratty ; let's 'ear all about it."

Sinclair recognised the voice of Hunter.

" What the 'ell's it got to do with you ? " said

the first speaker, whose feelings were evidently ruffled.

"Don't go taking offence so easy. I ain't laughing at yer. A man was a-creeping down the path. What 'appened then?"

"There ain't much more to tell," said the other sulkily. "While I were watching 'im, an 'orrible thing in white come out of the wood—all covered with blue flames it wor. I cut and run."

"What 'appened to the other man?"

"'Ow the 'ell should I know? It got 'im, I expect."

"Did you see anything more?" asked the persistent Hunter.

"Well, I did think I zeed a light in the cottage, in the upper room, though I can't be sarten sure."

"That's all your blooming imagination, Bill," another voice intervened.

"Oh, is it? Then what I want to know is, what's that blasted car doing up there? I meets it most nights coming 'ome."

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Kenyon.

"I've just arrived. Any news?"

"Nothing at present," said Sinclair, moving from the window. "But I have reason to believe there is someone at your old cottage."

"What, you have found something more out, then?"

"What better hiding-place could a man choose? The whole countryside is convinced that the place is haunted, and any signs of life would be put down to ghostly visitations. I have heard of apparitions, and

howlings heard in the night, and all the usual stuff, but it cannot be all put down to imagination. Whoever is at the bottom of this has just made the mistake of overdoing it."

" Then why in heaven's name don't we go straight to the cottage? All this uncertainty is killing me. Remember, my wife may be in danger."

Sinclair glanced at Kenyon for a moment, and then walked to the window. A bitter wind was blowing, and sleet was falling. He made a wry face. " It's a rotten day to go anywhere," he said.

" My dear fellow, fancy talking about the weather in a case like this. I tell you, if you don't go, I shall myself."

Sinclair seemed to take a sudden resolution. " Very well ; we will go, if you like."

Kenyon's face cleared. " That's better," he said. " I'll go and put on a thick coat and boots."

Sinclair paced the floor, and his mind was disturbed. Was it wise to force the issue in broad daylight? Or perhaps—yes, there was always that possibility. He gave a peculiar jerk of the head which was a sure sign that he had come to a decision, and went to his room to get ready. When he returned, Kenyon was waiting for him with impatience, and they set off up the village street on foot.

" Are you armed? " asked Sinclair.

" Only with this stick," said Kenyon in surprise. " I am not much used to firearms. I suppose you are? "

" I always carry a revolver," said Sinclair gravely.

At the old shed where Kenyon used to keep his car they called a halt. The quick walk up the steep and

muddy road and the beating of the wind had made them both breathless, and they were glad of a short rest.

"Here we must separate," said Sinclair. "I think you had better work your way through the woods. It will be an awfully messy job, but we can't help that. I will give you half an hour's start, as you will have to make a wide detour, and then I shall go straight to the cottage. I am choosing this part for myself as I am armed. If there is any truth in my theory, those inside the cottage will either attempt resistance or will bolt, in which case they will go for the wood, and then you will know what to do. If there are several, do not attempt to stop them, but try and identify them."

"All right," said Kenyon, "but if my wife is among them I shall probably attempt a rescue."

"In half an hour, then," said Sinclair. "You know exactly what to do."

Kenyon went off into the woods.

"Hallo! What have we here?" said Sinclair, under his breath, stooping down quickly at the door of the shed. On the ground were marks of motor-tyres. He approached the door and peered through the space where the two halves fitted badly and were kept together by a wooden bar. Within was darkness, and Sinclair inserted his finger and lifted the rough latch without difficulty. The shed was empty, but there were distinct signs that a car had been housed in it at no distant date. There were petrol and oil on the earth floor, and away in the corner an empty petrol tin, half hidden by rotting hay.

Sinclair carefully closed the door again and made

his way cautiously up the road in the direction of the cottage, crawling on all-fours the last part of the way. He slowly lifted himself from the mud and looked between the bars of the little gate. There were no signs of life in the cottage, and no smoke rose from the chimneys. The whole place looked the picture of ruin, and for a moment Sinclair's heart misgave him. Had all his calculations been wrong?

He consulted his wrist-watch, and saw that the time had come. His face was stern and anxious as he walked boldly down the path to the front door. The key he had obtained from Sergeant Curtis, but, before using it, he walked right round the cottage, making his way with difficulty through the matted vegetation. There were no signs that anybody had been there, though marks of footsteps would have shown clearly enough in the tangle of weeds. The shuttered windows gave him no hint, and he returned to the front door with a feeling of disappointment.

The key turned stubbornly in the lock, and he entered the living-room. Here were no signs of occupation, nor in the study beyond, which looked as though it had been unoccupied for months.

He searched the two bedrooms, but they gave no sign. One of them, which the murdered girl had occupied, was still furnished, but the other had been completely emptied of all furniture, and was only an empty shell.

Sinclair descended the stairs and met Kenyon in the living-room. He was wet and cold and not in the best of tempers. "Well," he asked, "what have you found?"

" Nothing," said Sinclair. " We seem to have come on a fool's errand."

" So all your talk of ghosts was nonsense. I thought as much," said Kenyon. " Let's get back."

" I am sorry," said Sinclair, " but you must remember it was you who wanted to come."

" Certainly, with my wife in possible danger ; but you must remember, Mr. Sinclair, that this place has extremely painful memories for me, and I had sworn that I would never come to it again."

" Very well," said Sinclair, in a humble tone. " I'll just look into the kitchen, and then we'll go." He opened the door and looked round the little place, but there was nothing to give him any hope that his theory had been right. He stepped inside and idly fingered the pots and pans hanging on the wall, and then placed his hand inadvertently on the oil-stove, and jumped back with a start. The top of the stove was still hot.

He knelt down with a rapid motion and pulled out the oil-burners with the utmost care. The wicks were still smouldering, and the stove must have been in use within the last few hours.

## CHAPTER XXIII

## THE DEATH OF FARRAR

They were back at the " Ivy Bush " at Littleworth.

" I don't know what you are going to do, Mr. Sinclair, but I'm going back to London. I've had enough of this wild-goose chase."

" I'm sorry, Mr. Kenyon, but we can't always succeed. I quite understand your feelings."

" Are you coming ? "

" Oh, I shall stay the night *here*. You see, I have no official duties now, and I might just as well be here, now that I have booked a room, as elsewhere."

" Please don't think me churlish," Mr. Kenyon said, holding out his hand. " I know you must be disappointed, and you have tried your best. Believe me, I am grateful."

" I suppose the tales of apparitions had led me to think there was more in it than there really was," said Sinclair.

" I'll just get the car round," Kenyon said.

When he had gone out, Sinclair rang the bell and said to the girl :

" You can tell the landlord that I will settle for Mr. Kenyon's room which I had ordered for him. I don't want the landlord to be at a loss."

" Thank you, sir."

" Have you any young brothers or sisters ? "

"Yes, sir, I have three," answered the girl, in wonder at the question.

"Are they at school?"

"Yes, sir—that is, I mean no."

"Which do you mean?" said Sinclair with a smile.

"Well, they were at school, but there has been a lot of measles about and all the schools are closed round here."

Sinclair slapped his thigh. "Fool that I was!" he said. "I never thought of that."

The girl looked her surprise.

"All right, thank you," said Sinclair, recovering himself. "I was just wondering why there were so many children about the streets."

"Are you sure you will not stop and have some food with me?" asked Sinclair as Kenyon came into the room.

"If you will excuse me, no. You don't seem to realise how I hate this place. Come and tell me in London if you have any further news. I shall go and see Boyce myself and stir him up. We cannot possibly let the matter drift on like this."

"As you please," said Sinclair stiffly.

. . . . . .

The sound of the car had scarcely died away in the distance when Sinclair summoned the girl. "Will you please make me a parcel of sandwiches and fill my flask with brandy and water as quickly as you can? And one other thing. If anyone comes here for me, please say nothing of where I have gone. You can simply tell the truth and say you don't

know. I may be away all night, but will come here in the morning and settle up."

"I will do as you wish, sir."

"Now, you fully understand? I know what village gossip is; they always discuss visitors in the bar. I don't want a word said about me. It may have the most serious consequences. Can I trust you?"

"Yes, sir, I won't say a word," said the girl, and went out to do his bidding.

Sinclair took the revolver from his pocket and carefully unloaded it, cleaned out the barrels, and inserted fresh cartridges.

Buttoning his heavy coat tightly round him, he dropped the weapon into his right-hand pocket and his parcel of food and flask into the left. He stole through the back door into the inn yard and across the garden, and, climbing a wall, made his way through the sodden fields at the back of the village.

In spite of the storm which was now raging and the steepness of the pathway, he moved at a rapid pace through the darkness which had now come on. A terrible fear was haunting his mind. He had staked everything on this venture, and, if it miscarried, the responsibility for another death would be on his hands.

The dark hump of the Downs rose before him, and he felt his way to the stile, where a track crossed the open fields, forming a short cut taken by the children going to the little school in the woods. It was black as pitch, and the wind was blowing strong. Sinclair dared not use his torch. He struggled on gamely. Twice he lost his way and was held up by a wire

fence. His feet sank into the sodden turf, springy and soft.

At last he reached the summit and proceeded down a slippery path to where the black woods showed dimly in the night. From tree to tree he crept, thankful that the undergrowth was not thick, and so out on to the road. A hundred yards to his right was the gate of the cottage, while on the left the road forked, one branch going down into the valley, the other ascending through the woods and o over the hill to Ketworth. At the junction was a clear space in which had been built a little red-brick church and a school-house.

Sinclair looked at the illuminated face of his watch, and fear seized him. His journey through the darkness had taken two hours. He hurried up the road in the shadow of the trees. The wall which surrounded the school yard loomed up on his right. The gate stood open. Before it stood a large motor-car, and Sinclair ran to it with a gasp. It was empty.

" Thank God ! " he said, under his breath.

The little school-house was in front of him. The noise of the wind deadened any sound as he approached the door, which yielded to his touch.

The door had not been closed. Within all was pitch-blackness, but a faint sound caught his ear. Someone was talking. Sinclair went forward in the direction of the sound, and crashed into the desks with which the place was furnished.

The noise echoed through the empty place, and Sinclair stopped, aghast. All need for caution had now gone, and he flashed his light round the schoolroom. Two doors faced him. He rushed for

the nearest, and found it locked. Seizing a stool, he rained blow after blow on the lock till it gave way and the door flew open. Holding his revolver before him, Sinclair entered and looked round.

The place was strangely furnished. Black curtains hung round the walls, and there was a bed, a table, and a washstand. On the bed a figure was lying, motionless, and Sinclair's hand trembled as he approached it.

"Too late, you cursed fool!" he muttered to himself, and flung back the coverlet.

A woman was lying, unconscious or dead, on the mattress, and Sinclair flashed his light on the face. One glance showed him that it was Moira Kenyon, and in frantic haste he put his hand over her heart. It was beating with quick, unnatural pulses, and Sinclair's experience told him that she had been drugged.

The sound of a pistol-shot came with a sharp crack from the next room, and Sinclair bounded to the door and into the schoolroom. The second door was standing open, and within was a wash-house, containing a copper and a sink. Another door, leading out into the yard, was fast closed. Lying on the floor was a man, and a thin wreath of smoke curled up to the roof. The smell of burnt cordite filled the place.

Sinclair turned the body over, and blank astonishment filled him. The face of an entire stranger looked up at him from the floor, smoke-blackened and with an ugly wound on the right temple. His right hand was almost touching a revolver.

Sinclair looked round the room with suspicion.

Then a sudden thought struck him, and he carefully examined the face of the dead man.

" Ah," he said at last, " I might have guessed."

The man had a mass of tangled greyish hair and a beard of the same colour, but with one tug Sinclair pulled the beard away and removed the wig which the man was wearing, showing the face of Farrar staring at him through his glazing eyes.

## CHAPTER XXIV

# MOIRA'S CONFESSION

### STARTLING DEVELOPMENT IN THE LITTLEWORTH CASE

### MRS. KENYON FOUND

### CAPTAIN FARRAR COMMITS SUICIDE

(*Special Report*)

Sensational developments have taken place in what is known as the Littleworth Case. Our readers will recall that Miss Kitty Lake was murdered last June, and that the promising young actor, George Anthony, was found guilty of the crime and sentenced to death.

The public were astonished, and a good deal of indignation was felt at the time, when a reprieve was granted at the last moment and his sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life.

It appears that Superintendent Sinclair, late of Scotland Yard, has been quietly continuing his investigations into the mysterious disappearance of Mrs. Robert Kenyon, which took place after the murder. It has been generally assumed that some accident had happened to her, as all trace of her whereabouts had been lost.

A sudden and dramatic turn has been taken in the affair, and the public are now asking whether a serious miscarriage of justice has not taken place.

As a result of the inquest at Littleworth on Captain Farrar, who was found shot under dramatic circumstances, the following certain facts have come to light :

Mrs. Kenyon in her statement tells the strange story of her abduction. It appears that she was terribly upset after the murder, and in a state bordering on hysteria. Her husband took her to his London house and there left her, in order to break the news to the bereaved mother of the murdered girl.

She was unable to rest, and, fearing a breakdown, took a powerful sleeping-draught. She remembers nothing further until she woke up in a strange room, where she has remained captive for a considerable time. Mrs. Kenyon states that she has a dim recollection of travelling in a car for a long time, and, when next she became conscious, she was in the room whose walls were surrounded by black curtains, which excluded all daylight.

It is not apparent how Superintendent Sinclair ascertained her whereabouts, but he and the anxious husband must have had suspicions that she was being hidden in the very cottage where the murder had taken place. This clever move on the part of the villain, who is now known to have been Captain Farrar, Mr. Kenyon's private secretary, was rendered possible by the fact that Mr. Kenyon had announced his intention of neither selling the cottage nor of occupying it himself.

Mrs. Kenyon was actually found in the small schoolhouse not far from the cottage, to which Farrar had removed her, evidently suspecting that his whereabouts had been discovered.

Superintendent Sinclair arrived in the nick of time, for a car was standing at the very door, and Mrs. Kenyon had been given a drug to render her removal possible. Doubtless, fearing that his retreat was cut off, Farrar committed suicide.

An account of the inquest and the finding of the jury is given in another column. Startling facts have come to light with regard to the man Farrar. It appears that he was court-martialled in India in connection with the death of a native, and barely escaped a capital sentence. The question which will interest the public mind is as

to whether this man was not concerned with the murder of Kitty Lake. A strong probability seems to point that way, but the lips which might have revealed the secret are now sealed in death. The action of the Home Secretary will be watched with the greatest interest.

Too much praise cannot be given to the work of ex-Superintendent Sinclair in the case. . . .

Sinclair put down the paper with a grunt. He had read enough.

They were sitting in Mr. Kenyon's study—Sinclair, Kenyon, and his wife, the latter propped up with pillows in an armchair. She was still feeling the effects of the ordeal through which she had passed.

Sinclair passed the newspaper cutting across to Kenyon. " I think that gives a fair idea of what took place," he said. " The coroner was very considerate to your wife."

" To think that that blackguard deceived us all ! I could not have believed it ; and yet I cannot say that I trusted the man."

" Tell us what happened, if you feel you can do so—I mean, beyond the mere facts brought out at the inquest," asked Sinclair, turning to Mrs. Kenyon.

" There is nothing much to tell. I was kept in one room, my old bedroom, and had a measure of freedom, though the door was always locked. There were shutters at the windows, as you know, and these were securely nailed up, and black curtains hung in front of them.

" I did not dare to try to escape that way, and once, when I looked out through a crack in the shutters, I saw that dreadful hunchback watching.

I knew that any cry or sound would bring him up, and worse things might happen, while if anyone saw me or heard a sound they would run for their lives."

"Did he ever try and molest you in any way?'

"Never. He did not even speak. At first I was afraid of horrible things, but when I knew who he was——"

"You knew his identity, then?" asked Kenyon.

"Yes. It is difficult to say exactly when. He was completely disguised—not only his face, but he appeared to be hunchbacked. He walked with a stoop. It must have been some familiar trick of movement which reminded me of him, and then I heard him talking."

"Talking? To whom?"

"I believe it was Sarah Middleton, the half-witted girl. They were in the room below, and he was very angry with her. I suppose he was off his guard for a moment."

"Sarah Middleton? Oh, yes, of course; someone had to bring supplies," said Sinclair. "It was clever, too, for I suppose he had played on her fears, and, even if she did let out that there was someone in the cottage, her mother would think she was suffering from some delusion."

"I heard him say that he had told her not to bring things to the cottage, but to leave them somewhere—I could not hear where—and she said something about the wet. He threatened that the ghost would get her, and she started crying. That's all I heard."

"You had no idea of the passage of time, then?"

" Only by meals and the nights ; I lost count of time. Farrar brought me books, but, of course, no papers. It was awful, the long waiting."

" Well, now you must forget it," said Kenyon soothingly, patting her hand. " Thank God you are safe at last. I am going to take you for a holiday."

Mr. Kenyon rose to his feet. " By Jove ! I must get off at once. I have to see the Home Secretary, you know. He wants to consult me as to the possibility of doing something with regard to Anthony. You see, we have absolutely no proof of Farrar's guilt. It was a mean thing not to leave some document which would have cleared Anthony."

" I hope you will do what you can," said Sinclair, " but from a legal point of view you haven't a leg to stand on. You know that if a man has been found guilty by a British jury he is always guilty, and at the most can only receive what is called a ' free pardon ' for something he has never done."

" Are you staying here ? " asked Kenyon.

" If you don't mind, I will ask Mrs. Kenyon a few questions. It may help us in our investigations."

Sinclair went with Kenyon as far as the door, which he shut carefully. He returned and took a seat in front of Mrs. Kenyon.

" Now, Mrs. Kenyon," he said quietly, " you have something to tell me."

" Oh, Mr. Sinclair, I have so much to tell I do not know how to begin."

" Take your time," he said, seeing her agitation, " and, if you don't mind, I will smoke."

She nodded assent, and he produced his pipe and lit it, watching the struggle that was going on in her

mind by the fleeting emotions which were passing over her face.

"First, Mr. Sinclair, I want to tell you how deeply grateful I am for all you have done for me."

"Please don't mention it," he said, still watching her.

"Then I want to tell you how much I feel—you know, about that reprieve. I have heard all about it."

Sinclair nodded his head and waited. "That is not what you wanted to tell me," he said.

"No," she said with an effort, looking everywhere but at the man opposite to her. "Mr. Sinclair, I have an awful confession to make."

"Please go on," said Sinclair. "I think I can guess."

"Had I known, I could have said the words which would have cleared George from this charge."

"I thought as much."

She gave him a puzzled look, and then went on: "You know, when that awful thing happened at our cottage I was completely overwhelmed, and had no chance to say anything. Then, of course, before I could speak I was abducted by Farrar and the chance had gone. I knew nothing of George's arrest or trial, and it is awful to think that if you had not got the reprieve he would have been——" She burst into tears.

"Try and calm yourself, Mrs. Kenyon," said Sinclair firmly.

"I am so sorry. I will not give way again," she said, recovering herself with an effort. "Mr. Sinclair, you say you can guess what I was going to say to you. I don't know how you could. That letter

—it was written by George, not to Kitty, but to me." She paused, and Sinclair smoked on in silence.

"I said I had a confession to make. George was in love with me—passionately in love—but hopelessly. I give you my word of honour before God that there was nothing guilty in our love. I had never encouraged it, and had tried to make him go away for fear that something would be found out."

"And you?"

"I loved him too," she said, covering her face with her hands. Then she raised her head proudly. "But if I was unfaithful to my husband it was in my heart only, and we cannot help the feelings of our hearts, can we? In no other way did I ever behave disloyally. George has never kissed me in his life, or attempted to."

"I believe you, Mrs. Kenyon."

"I am so glad, but why?"

"I saw that letter, and I am some judge of these things. But tell me, did your husband know?"

"Never. Of that I am certain."

"Did anyone else know?"

"Yes, Kitty. She found out."

In spite of the gravity of the situation, Sinclair smiled. "Oh, Lord!" he said. "If this had come out at the trial it would have made matters worse instead of better."

"How?"

"Never mind. Tell me, did you get that letter?"

"No, I knew nothing whatever about it."

"I begin to see the whole thing. I had suspected this. Anthony wrote to you to make a last appointment—I suppose he wanted you to go off with him?"

Ro

"Yes, and I had refused."

"He came down to Littleworth to see you. He did not even know that Miss Lake was staying there, as he said. He gave the note to the girl, telling her to give it to the young lady, and she gave it to Kitty."

Moira gave a sad smile. "Yes, I suppose, as I'm a married woman, she thought in her simple mind the 'young lady' must be Kitty."

"Then George came, expecting to see you, and found Kitty. She, I suppose, urged him to go away. That is all clear. He came back during the night to try and get the letter, when I saw him."

"And the noble man would not say a word at the trial, and was going to his death rather than bring my name into the case or ruin my reputation."

"I thought as much," said Sinclair musingly. "You have not told your husband?"

"I dare not. That is why I want your advice. If it had been a question of saving George's life I would have spoken, but how would it help to get him released? It would only prove of a certainty that he was in the room with Kitty."

"Exactly. And it might be said that he had killed her to save the secret being made public."

"Oh dear, what shall we do?"

"Have you no suspicions yourself?"

Moira turned even paler than before. "Mr. Sinclair, one innocent man has been accused already, and God forbid that I should make a false accusation. Has it never struck you that there was one man who could have done this thing? I don't say he did, but it was possible."

"Yes," said Sinclair.

" Captain Farrar. I know I ought not to say it, especially now that he is dead, but I never trusted that man. You remember, he went round the house while my husband was trying to break down the door, and we only have his word for it that he found her dead. It is awful—but he had time to do it. When I came from the kitchen my husband was breaking open the door."

" You are right in one thing," said Sinclair. " He took a long time going round that cottage. I tried it myself."

" Can nothing be done? It is terrible to think of George in that dreadful place."

" It is, but you must remember," said Sinclair sternly, " that he is expiating, not the crime he never committed, but one of which he was never accused. Whatever sympathy one may feel, he was making love to another man's wife and trying to induce her to leave her husband."

" It is a heavy sentence for such a crime."

" Women can forgive, but many a man has met his death for this."

" What am I to do? " she asked hopelessly. " I don't see that, if I told my husband, anything but misery could result. It would not help George."

" No, you must keep the secret. It is a punishment laid upon you both. It is safe with me."

" Is there no chance? "

" Who knows? I have had a long experience of life, and I suppose most men would call me fairly successful, but I have arrived at one conclusion—perhaps it is my Indian training."

" What is that? " she asked.

" That all human endeavour is of no avail unless it is the will of God that a certain end is to be. I have known cases where criminals have gone unpunished for the lack of one tiny bit of evidence. Who knows, perhaps their punishment has been more dreadful than if they had come under the force of the law. Perhaps where we have failed there may be something beyond our powers which will take the problem out of our hands. Or it may be that we shall never know the truth."

She shivered though the room was warm ; her Irish blood conjured up a vision of an accusing demon. " But the dead do not speak," she whispered with white lips.

" I would not go so far as that," said Sinclair. " Strange things happen in this world of ours."

## CHAPTER XXV

## 2LO

The tale was finished, and the landlord of the "Half Moon" bustled into the room and glanced meaningly at the clock.

"You want us to go?" said Sinclair.

"Well, it's time, gentlemen, but I don't want to hurry you."

"It's all right," said Sinclair, putting on his wet coat, which he had been drying by the fire. "Come on, Nevin, my friend."

The other man emptied his glass and rose without a word.

They were half way to Ketworth before either spoke.

"You said that you wanted to tell me the story because you need a confidant. I don't understand. We are very good friends, but why did you pick me out of all men for this purpose?"

"Because you are the only man who can help me. You are a highly placed official in the British Broadcasting. Can you arrange something for me?"

"I daresay. What is it?"

Sinclair spoke long and earnestly, unfolding his plan. On the face of the other was a look of blank astonishment. They passed the first lamp-post at Ketworth before he had done.

"This is the most amazing thing I have ever heard. I do not know whether I ought to consent."

"You will know nothing," said Sinclair earnestly. "I will take full responsibility."

Nevin stopped in the street and took Sinclair's hand. "I will do it," he said, "though heaven alone knows what will happen."

"Thank you," said Sinclair simply. "Don't forget, the tenth of June."

"I am not likely to forget," said Nevin solemnly. "And has she consented to do her part?"

"Yes, I have persuaded her at last. Without her help I doubt if we could do anything. You see, they were twins."

. . . . . .

When it was announced that Robert Kenyon was going to broadcast from 2LO, the news sent a thrill throughout the country. Everyone knew they were going to hear something out of the ordinary. His powerful plays had always had a gruesome touch about them. Country-house parties were made up, and children were packed off to bed. In some places the lights were turned low to get the right atmosphere.

It had been announced that he would broadcast a monologue which was supposed to represent a prisoner in the condemned cell, the night before his execution, going over the story of his crime. No one doubted that they would have their hair properly raised.

At the studio Kenyon was met by Nevin. His face had an anxious look, and there was a tremor in his hand as he greeted Kenyon.

The playwright had expressed the wish to be alone. He did not want his mind to be distracted by an orchestra or any other person in the room, and the manager, knowing the whims of these great writers, had consented.

The two men entered the studio. There were a table and a chair set before the microphone, with an electric shaded lamp to shed a bright light on the reading-desk.

" I think you will find everything in order," said Nevin.

Kenyon looked round the room and passed a hand over his eyes. " Why black curtains ? " he said in a troubled voice.

" It is better for the sound," said Nevin in surprise.

" Oh, yes, of course. But why have you put a catafalque there ? " And he pointed with a trembling finger.

" Catafalque ? Whatever do you mean ? That is only a table." He looked queerly at Kenyon.

" Oh, to be sure," said the other, with a hollow laugh. " My nerve is all upset to-night. Strange ! "

Nevin looked at him anxiously. " Can I fetch you a brandy and soda or something ? "

" Thank you, I should like one."

Nevin went out quickly, and Kenyon was left alone. " What day is this ? " he muttered, half to himself.

" The tenth of June," said a voice behind him.

Kenyon gave a startled cry, and looked round fearfully, but there was nothing but the black, forbidding curtains, and a bare room. Who had

spoken—or had he imagined it? He wished he had not asked to be alone. He pulled himself together. Of course, it was some wireless trickery. What could one expect in a place like this?

Nevin came back with a minor official carrying a tray with brandy, a syphon, and a glass, and set it on the table.

Kenyon eagerly poured himself out a stiff drink, and drained the glass.

"Are you sure you are all right?" asked Nevin. "We don't want anything to go wrong. Would you rather postpone your monologue?"

"Certainly not," said Kenyon angrily. "I shall be all right. Let's see, I think I've got it. I shall hear you announce my name, and then I speak into the microphone, as though reciting in a room?"

"That's quite right. Just talk in your natural voice. You were very clear at the practice this afternoon. I have a copy of your monologue, and, if there is anything not quite right, I will slip in and let you know. There is just five minutes. Shall I leave you?"

There was an appealing look in Kenyon's eyes, as though he would have liked the other to stay, but his pride came to his rescue. "Yes, please do so," he said.

The door shut with a soft pad like the closing of a vault. He was alone. The clock ticked in front of him with rhythmic beats. He had five minutes. He spread out his manuscript and reached for the decanter, though he was an abstemious man. The perspiration stood on his forehead. What a fool he had been to come! He wanted to turn out the

lights, leaving only the reading-lamp, but knew that he dared not do it. Then, in sudden anger at his own weakness, he went to the switch and turned it savagely and returned to his seat.

"Damn the clock!" he muttered. "It's like the death-watch." How he remembered that ticking when he—— He pulled himself together.

"A year ago!"

This would never do. He set his teeth firmly and looked at his paper, though he knew the monologue by heart. He heard a faint sound; the announcer was starting. He gave one glance round the room, and seemed to see a white mist gathering in the corner.

"Bah!" he said. "Some trick of the imagination. My nerve is all gone to-night."

The announcer ceased, and he braced himself to begin.

All over England, listening thousands sat back in their chairs prepared to be thrilled. The monologue opened. The prisoner was turning on his restless bed in the cell. It was his last night on earth. The stillness of the cell had got into his head, and he began to mutter to himself. He would tell all. Yes, all of the horrible story. He could bear it no longer.

The opening sentences were given in a clear, firm voice. Then there came a change. The level tones had a jarring note. There was terror, vibrant and real. "Keep away! Keep away! Why do you come to haunt me? Your eyes—why do you look at me? They're dead eyes, but they stare. O God!" His voice trailed off into a mumbling sound, and then the listeners heard another voice speaking—a girl's voice, clear and distinct.

" Why did you kill me ? I never did you harm. I only gave you my love, and if you had told me you didn't want me I would have gone away. I was so young, and I wanted to live."

Listeners turned to each other in horror. What was the meaning of this ? It was getting too gruesome.

The girl's voice continued : " When you came to me I thought you were going to take me in your arms and tell me we would face the world together, but then I saw your face and half guessed the truth. There was hate and cruelty. And then I saw the ugly knife you had concealed, and I was so young."

" Go ! Go ! You are driving me mad ! " shrieked Kenyon, in an agonised voice.

" I would have let you strike if you had done it in love, if you had only told me it was necessary ! But your hate killed me before the knife touched my throat."

There came shrieks of maniac laughter, and then Kenyon's voice, hardly recognisable : " Stop, stop ! I can bear no more. Has not my life been hell ever since that night ? Have I known a moment's peace ? I would to God I had killed myself instead, but then my revenge—— Ah, you want the story. You are tearing the truth out of me. Well, why not ? What do I care ? " And there was a burst of inhuman laughter. " All right, then, I did kill you. I don't care who knows it. The chance was too good to be missed. Anthony, the adulterous devil, was after my wife. Ah, you didn't know that ? I saw the letter, and I knew he was coming. Why didn't I kill him, you ask ? No, no ; I haven't written plays for nothing. I had something better for him than that. I wanted

to see him tortured—not an easy death—and you had to be the victim. I couldn't face exposure. And it all worked out so well. Moira would have been the next. I got Farrar to take her away. She's suffered already, but so have I ; all of us have suffered. There is nothing to choose. And Farrar—he has suffered too. Poor mean fool, he had to go to keep the secret. Ah, ah, to keep the secret ! You want me, you say ? No, no, keep away ! "

There was shriek after shriek, and then a low mumbling sound, scarcely human, more like a beast than a man.

Nevin had listened, at first in perplexity. He had a copy of the monologue before him, but what was this ? Had Kenyon changed it at the last moment ? It was beyond words. There would be trouble. And that other voice, what was that ?

Women listeners were fainting, and already the telephone was busy with protests. Nevin snatched the head-phones from his ears, switched off the current, and ran down the passage. The door was not locked, and he dashed it open and switched on the light.

A twisted figure was lying on the floor, its face distorted with unspeakable horror. The hair was snowy white. Kenyon was dead.

Kneeling beside the body was Sinclair with a grim, set face, while Madeline Lake was seated in a chair, crying hysterically.

" What is the meaning of this ? " asked Nevin. " You have gone too far, Mr. Sinclair."

" It was necessary," replied the other, looking up with a white face. " It was the only way. We have

had such a confession as has never been known in the annals of crime. Look!" He pointed with his finger to the throat of the dead man.

A red scar, as of a wound which had been healed, stretched across the livid flesh.

"It was just such a wound as that," he said. "A strange crime for such a man," he continued. "The dead sometimes do give up their secrets."

With a shiver he took a rug from the floor and covered the body of Robert Kenyon, the writer of strange plays.

## CHAPTER XXVI

## EXPLANATIONS

The scene at the studio sent a wave of horror over the country. At first many people thought it was a gruesome jest carried too far, but those who remembered the Littleworth case shook their heads.

It was only when the daily papers announced the death of Robert Kenyon that some part of the truth was revealed. It had been found impossible to keep the facts from the Press. The story was too good to be missed, and editors argued, with justice, that the whole of England had listened to the broadcast.

It was the one topic of conversation in the trains and in clubs. It was without precedent in the history of broadcasting.

Even when the full details were told the significance of the tragedy was hardly realised. Some thought Kenyon had died from heart failure, while others were of opinion that he had gone mad.

Sinclair made his way to the Home Office, whither he had been summoned by Sir John Westgate, the Home Secretary.

"Come in, Mr. Sinclair," said Sir John. "We have been waiting for you anxiously for some time."

"I am sorry, sir," said Sinclair, taking the seat offered to him. "I have only just got away from the broadcasting people."

" I don't wonder," said Sir John with a laugh. " Are they going to prosecute you ? It was a nasty trick to play them. By the way, you haven't met Sir William Falcon, the Attorney-General. He is most eager to hear your story."

The two men shook hands.

" Well, what did the broadcasting people make of it ? " asked the Home Secretary.

" It wasn't so bad as I expected. You see, a great number of people had never heard of the Littleworth case, strange as it may appear, and a larger number had clean forgotten about it. Most of the listeners thought it was a very gruesome monologue, entirely fictitious, and their only protest was that it was too realistic. My friend Nevin thought I had let him down, but I think I have put matters right with him."

" Why did you do it ? Was it absolutely necessary ? "

" I had given months of thought, and could see no other way in which I could drag a confession of guilt from this man."

" Can we start from the beginning ? " said the Attorney-General. " I am very keen to know exactly how Mr. Sinclair has accomplished this miracle."

" You are quite right, Sir William. Let's have Mr. Sinclair's tale."

" Very well, then. When I arrived at the cottage, shortly after the murder had taken place, and heard the statements of Kenyon and Farrar, I think my suspicions were aroused at once. There seemed, if I may say so, too much evidence. If the murder had been a sudden act after a violent quarrel I could have

understood it taking place in the sitting-room, but if it was deliberately planned, as appeared from the evidence, it was nothing but sheer madness to arrange for a murder within a few feet of two possible witnesses.

" I think my mind turned at once to the possibility that either Kenyon and Farrar were jointly responsible, or that one of the two had done the deed without the knowledge of the other. I began to piece things together. Would any murderer leave a knife lying on the floor, instead of taking it with him, when he had carefully worn gloves to hide fingerprints? Kenyon had sent Farrar round the house, and he had fallen over a mowing-machine, which was standing on the path. I questioned the man John, who does the garden and odd jobs, and he most emphatically told me that he always kept this machine in a shed at the back, and was sure that he had put it away that day.

" I am a student of human nature, and especially of physiognomy, and I will confess that at first I thought Farrar was the more likely of the two men to have committed such a brutal crime. I was almost sure I had met him before, and I was right. I will come back to that presently."

The Attorney-General looked up quickly. " Just a moment, Mr. Sinclair. I don't want to interrupt you, but I have brought a précis of the evidence with me and I want to check the various points. It is vitally important, because we must have something more than the mere confession on the wireless, dramatic as it is, on which to act."

" I agree," said the Home Secretary. " It is quite

obvious that the man went mad at the end, through fear or remorse."

"He was always mad," said Sinclair. "Don't misunderstand me. To the world he appeared perfectly sane, but he had a peculiar kink in his mind which made him write those extraordinary plays of his. Or it may have been that the writing of those plays induced the madness. His mind was for ever dealing with subtle and horrible murder plots until the border-line between reality and imagination became obscured. Shall I go on with the narrative?"

"Please do," said Sir William.

"Well, then, I went carefully through the evidence. Kenyon was walking about the room in an excited state, as though expecting something to happen. He was carrying a silk handkerchief in his hand—the fact struck me as peculiar, though the explanation is now obvious."

"He wished to hold the knife with it!" said the Home Secretary.

"Yes. And the next point, which was fully brought out in the evidence, was the question of the lock. It was quite a flimsy affair, which a man of average strength could have smashed in at once. Yet, from Mr. Kenyon's statement, it took him three or four minutes to break down the door. You will notice that he said in evidence that he started *immediately* to break the door, yet there was an appreciable interval before Mrs. Kenyon heard the sound, and she had time to get from the kitchen before he had finished. I paced and timed all these distances, and came to the conclusion that there was ample time for Kenyon

to have slipped into the room, done the murder, and returned to the living-room."

"But the door was locked?"

"We have nothing but Kenyon's own word for that. He tried the handle and *said* it was locked. There was another curious point: why should Kenyon choose to go over his play in the living-room rather than in his own study, where he actually kept his documents, and which would be cooler on this June day, with the French windows open?

"While I kept my vigil in the study that night I began to speculate. Of course, I had no idea at that time that Anthony was the man who had come, but I had got the three men to remain in the living-room because I thought the writer of the note would probably try and recover it. When I saw Anthony leave the living-room——"

"One moment," said Sir William. "You actually saw him leave the sitting-room, not in the garden?"

Sinclair laughed. "I should have thought it was fairly obvious. I stated in the evidence that the man who came was only a black figure in the night, and was covering his head with a cloak. It was impossible to recognise him."

"Why did you make that statement at all? I was always puzzled by it."

"I did it deliberately. Kenyon was sitting in the room, having given his evidence, and when I said I knew who the man was I watched his face closely. With all his strength of will he could not hide a look of pleasure, a horrible, cruel look, which crossed his face. It opened my eyes to a possibility which I had not thought of, namely, that a crime had been

So

committed with the double intent to murder the girl and to throw the blame on to Anthony. What was the meaning of this? There could be only one possible explanation. The note had not been intended for Kitty Lake. What obstacle would there be to their love?

"That was as far as I had got when I went away. It was all so vague that there was nothing that I could possibly put before the authorities before I went, but I already foresaw that Anthony stood a serious chance of being charged with the crime."

"You were very strongly convinced of his innocence. Why?"

"It is difficult to say; partly from what I have already stated, and partly from my study of him while I had him under observation. This I have already told you, Sir John."

The Home Secretary nodded.

"After the reprieve had been granted I set to work on the problem. Fresh facts had come to light in the evidence given at the trial and from a conversation I had with Sergeant Curtis. Kenyon had publicly announced that he would neither dispose of the cottage nor live in it himself. He went there with Sergeant Curtis, and was subtly hinting at Anthony's guilt under the pretence that he could not believe such was the case.

"Then there was Mrs. Kenyon's disappearance. In a flash I saw a possibility that she could have cleared Anthony, and was being deliberately kept out of the way; perhaps, even, she had been murdered. Again we only had Kenyon's word for her disappearance.

" Then I think the truth dawned on me that the note was addressed to her, and that Anthony and she were carrying on an intrigue. The whole thing became as clear as daylight. Kenyon had become aware that something was going on behind his back. What would such a man do? Very likely kill them both, as in *Pelléas and Mélisande*. He was of that sombre turn of mind. But an opportunity presented itself for a gruesome and cunning revenge consonant with his semi-mad genius.

" Kitty Lake worshipped him madly. He was her ideal, and she had received great favours from him. Perhaps she was not actually in love with him, but was completely under his thumb. He used her for his own vile ends, partly to be revenged on his wife. Then he was faced, as many men have been before, with the consequences of his action. Public exposure, possibly the Divorce Court, would be utterly repugnant to such a man, and would, moreover, give his wife a chance of freedom, and of becoming the wronged party, which he would never give her. Then his opportunity came. He must have seen that note. Perhaps he had not actually planned to trap Anthony, but here was the man setting his own trap. He arranged to leave the study vacant, and—who knows?—perhaps he had even asked Kitty to go in there, a chance she welcomed with the letter burning in her pocket.

" At any rate, Anthony came, and the girl pleaded with him to break off this infatuation. Perhaps he had agreed."

" All that fits in quite well, but of one point I am doubtful," said the Home Secretary. " If Kitty Lake

was in love with Kenyon, surely she would have welcomed the chance of him being freed by the Divorce Court?"

"You never know a woman's mind. I think her worship of Kenyon was so complete that she was willing to sacrifice herself sooner than have his career wrecked. This we can only guess.

"Mrs. Kenyon had to be got out of the way, or she would have told the truth to save Anthony, although, of course, she knew nothing about the letter. Had Kenyon completed his revenge by murder, or was the idea of slow torture still working in his mind? Farrar had gone—where? Kenyon had told him to take two months' leave, and had promised to pay him a cheque *at his house in London.* Why did he not pay him at the cottage and have done with it? I began to see a possibility that Kenyon might be employing Farrar to keep Mrs. Kenyon out of the way. He would not, of course, tell him the reason. By this time I had ascertained Farrar's past record."

"Yes; he had been court-martialled in India," said Sir William.

"There was much worse than that. He and Forester, of whose death in Constantinople you have heard, had both been concerned with murder and lesser crimes, and had made India too hot for them. Forester told me all about it, thinking I would not live to tell anyone. He was merely hiding here till the hue and cry for Zania, the Indian girl, had subsided, and the two scoundrels were going to start again. Forester had actually been staying in Sussex and seeing Farrar. At one moment I actually fancied

they were both concerned with this murder, but it was too fantastic."

"But one moment," said the Home Secretary. "Before you go any further, if your theory is correct, how do you account for the fact that Kenyon was unceasing in his efforts to try and obtain a reprieve for Anthony, and was constantly helping the Lakes in their trouble?"

"I know. It's horrible, but that's the character of the man. I have no doubt at times he was filled with remorse, and, as we know from his confession, he was haunted day and night by his crime. I found him crying at his house the night before the execution was to have taken place. I suppose he felt that his revenge would be satisfied by penal servitude, and it would appear a more artistic form of torture to his warped mind. Then, of course, you must remember it also served to avert any suspicion falling on himself.

"I was completely at a standstill when Hunter came into my flat with his news about the cottage.

"The situation was desperate. Either of these men was capable of murder. There was only one possible thing to do. A direct raid on the cottage might have led to tragic results to Mrs. Kenyon, and, though we might have taken Farrar, dead or alive, the real criminal would have escaped. No. If my theory was correct, Kenyon knew where his wife was. I took the news to him, knowing the risk, and shadowed him from that moment."

"Is that why you resigned?" asked the Home Secretary.

"Partly. I felt that either I must report the whole matter to Scotland Yard or be free myself to act."

" Please go on."

" Kenyon started off in a car which is not his own, and I was hard on his tracks. I had expected him to go straight to the cottage, or at any rate to Littleworth, and, of course, dared not follow too close. He gave me the slip at a crossroads while another car was between us. I left my car some way from the cottage and watched through the night, with the result you know. The two men were Kenyon and Farrar, and the fact that Kenyon came away showed me that they had formed some plan.

" Kenyon had deliberately fostered the idea that the cottage was haunted, so that no countryman would go near it.

" I had arranged to meet Kenyon at Littleworth the next day, and he kept the appointment. Then it became a duel between us. When he wanted to go there at once, I saw that either Mrs. Kenyon had been removed, or he was laying a trap for me. I took the risk, and, as you know, we found the cottage empty.

" I imagined that he had taken alarm and had removed her to another hiding-place. Every trace had been carefully removed, but they had forgotten one small point. The stove in the kitchen was still hot. They had only just gone. Kenyon pretended to return to London, and I sat down to think out the problem.

" What would I do myself in a case like this ? He had not had time to prepare another retreat, and he would not dare to take her to London. He would find some temporary place of concealment, and thither he had gone. I cast my eyes over the

surroundings in my mind, and suddenly remembered the little schoolroom in the wood. When I found out that an epidemic of measles had caused the schools to be closed I felt certain I was on the track.

" There was need for instant action. I dare not take a car, as the roads would be watched. The one chance was to get there before they had removed her. I nearly killed myself struggling up that hill in the night. You know the rest."

" Please finish your story," said the Attorney-General.

" It is only speculation, but I think what happened was this. You will remember I heard sounds of talking when I entered the school-house. The car was waiting at the gate. I broke open the door of the room where Mrs. Kenyon was, and, as it was certain that she had not been speaking, I realised at once that it was Kenyon and Farrar. Kenyon must have heard the noise, and knew I was on his track. He probably thought I had a posse of police with me, and that the building was surrounded.

" He took one of those instant and deadly resolves which he has made famous in his plays. Farrar must be removed. He shot him down ruthlessly, placed the revolver by his hand, and fled. If he had been discovered he would simply have said that he, like myself, was trying to find his wife. It was a desperate remedy, but the only possible one. Finding no one watching, he fled back to London.

" All this sounds plausible enough now, but if I had come to you at that stage you would simply have dismissed the whole thing as absurd. I was bound to have incontrovertible testimony. I could read

Kenyon's mind. There was now another murder on his conscience. He was a haunted, tortured man. He was not a callous, indifferent ruffian of the type of Farrar. He was more highly strung, more educated.

" I got hold of my friend Nevin, of the British Broadcasting, and took him to the cottage and told him the whole story, except my own speculations. I asked him to request Kenyon to broadcast a monologue on the actual anniversary of the murder. His intense vanity made him consent, and the result you know."

" And you got Madeline Lake to impersonate her sister ? "

" Yes. She refused at first, but when I pointed out to her that it was the only way to get Anthony released, she consented. It was taking a grave risk, but I was pretty sure of the result."

The Attorney-General glanced across at the Home Secretary.

" What do you think of the whole case now ? " he asked.

" Mr. Sinclair has made the matter clear to my mind. Of course, there will be formalities, but I will urge the matter forward and obtain a free pardon for George Anthony." He turned to Sinclair with a smile. " It was you who obtained his reprieve. Would you like to take a free pardon to the governor of Parkston ? "

" Certainly," said Sinclair. " I would like to see the thing through to the end."

" I will see that it is posted to you in due course," said the Home Secretary.

When Sinclair had taken his departure, the Attorney-General remarked : " We've lost a very good man in Sinclair. It is a pity he has resigned."

" I have to put in the name of one of my officials for a K.C.B. in the Honours List," said Sir John. " What about Sinclair ? "

" Won't Boyce be offended ? He is senior, and it is his turn."

" Oh, Boyce can wait. It won't do him any harm. Sinclair has done brilliant work for years, and his work for the India Office alone would warrant his inclusion."

## CHAPTER XXVII

## EXPIATION

"Mr. Sinclair, I am coming with you."

Sinclair was just getting into the train at Victoria when Mrs. Kenyon came to him.

"Do you think it is wise, Mrs. Kenyon?"

"I am coming," she answered firmly. "If you would rather I travelled alone, I will do so."

Sinclair held the door open for her without another word.

"You knew I was going?" he asked, when the train had started.

"Yes. The Home Secretary told me."

Sinclair looked at the worn face before him, still beautiful but stamped with a sadness which only time could eradicate.

"Mr. Sinclair, I can tell you now—I must tell you—this terrible event did not cause me the shock you might think it did."

"You suspected the truth?"

"No one knows what I have suffered," she said, evading the direct answer. "I would never have spoken if this had not happened. Mr. Sinclair, my husband was a devil."

"He was mad, Mrs. Kenyon, I am sure of it."

She gave a hard laugh. "It is difficult to say where madness begins. My life was a hell from the

moment I married him. He took a pleasure in every form of torture to get 'impressions' for his plays. He would taunt me openly with his infidelity. Behind the mask he wore in public he was a libertine and a bully. George knew something of this, and suspected more. That, as much as his love, urged him to take me away."

"I wonder you didn't go," said Sinclair.

"Mr. Sinclair, I am a Catholic, and we do not recognise divorce. We hold the marriage-tie sacred, and I had to go on. But oh, the horror of it all! Do you know, I actually welcomed the change when I was shut up, even though I thought he was going to murder me."

A thought flashed across Sinclair's mind. "You suspected him of the murder?"

"I knew it. *I saw him coming from the room.* He shut the door and turned and saw me."

"Then that was the reason for the abduction? I had thought it was to prevent you helping Anthony."

"For both reasons, but he knew I would not tell on him unless it was to save another life."

"You would not have told?"

"He was my husband, Mr. Sinclair," she said simply.

"The longer I live the more I am baffled by the ways of women," said Sinclair. "You could not have loved him after all you had suffered."

"What has that got to do with it? I would never have sent him to his death."

"What are you going to do now?" asked Sinclair.

"The future holds nothing for me," she said sadly.

" There can never be anything but pain, and the shadow of that man will always be between George and myself. We can only be friends, but if my life can help to make him forget the awful ordeal through which he has passed, I will devote it to that purpose."

The train slowed down at the station, and they got out.

" I think it would be wiser if you let me go to the prison. You would spare him humiliation. Let me take you to an hotel to wait."

" You have the order for release ? "

" Yes. It is what we call a ' free pardon.' In the ordinary course it would be sent by post to the governor of the prison, but the Home Secretary asked if I would care to take it personally. The governor has, of course, already been notified."

. . . . . .

A haggard, grey-haired man passed out of the prison gates, leaning on Sinclair's arm.

" Which way now ? " he said, in a dull, lifeless voice.

" She is waiting for you, Anthony." He led his companion down the narrow, crowded street to the centre of the town.

They walked down the street in silence. Anthony was engrossed with his own thoughts. It was all so wonderful to see free men going about their work and happy children playing, unconscious of the hell from which he had come in the very heart of their town.

" It was right that I should suffer," said Anthony

abruptly. "I was too conceited, too cocksure. I thought the world was at my feet. I have been brought to my proper place."

"I suppose you will go back to the stage in time?" Sinclair asked, to turn Anthony's mind from morbid thoughts.

"Never! I shall go abroad—anywhere where I can forget. The very sight of the English country in spring would bring it all back to me."

"Here we are," said Sinclair cheerily, as they turned the corner and faced the Woolpack Hotel. "Mrs. Kenyon is waiting for you in that room. You had better go and see her." He took the other's arm and gently led him to a closed door.

Anthony scarcely thanked him. He opened the door, and Sinclair heard a cry of joy. There was a smile on his face as he turned back into the hall.

A car rushed up to the door, and a man sprang out and made for Sinclair.

"Hullo, Sir Arthur! I thought we would find you here," said Barratt, wringing Sinclair's hand. "We chased you down here. My wife is in the car. Where's George and Moira?"

"One thing at a time," said Sinclair, laughing. "They are inside together, but why do you call me 'Sir Arthur'?"

"Haven't they told you? The Home Secretary has sent your name in for a K.C.B. I heard to-day at the Home Office, where I went to get news of you. Isn't it splendid?"

Sinclair gave a cynical smile. "Boyce will be pleased," he said.

" Come on, Madeline," said Barratt. " Here's Sir Arthur Sinclair."

" Oh, shut up ! Wait till I'm in the list," said Sinclair ; but the honour was one that he fully appreciated.

He blushed like any young girl at Madeline's congratulations.

" We've got everything fixed up, Mr. Sinclair—Sir Arthur that is to be," said Madeline merrily. " George and Moira must come along with us, and you too. We have a gem of a place in Devonshire " —she lowered her voice—" where they can forget all the past. Do persuade them to come."

The door opened behind them and the two came out. On Anthony's face a calm look of peace had settled. Moira carried her head proudly, and there was a light in her eyes—a light from heaven itself.

No words passed between the four friends as they greeted each other. Sinclair turned his back and walked a few paces up the road.

" Jump in," said Madeline. " George, you shall ride with me, and Moira can sit in front. We can squeeze Mr. Sinclair in. London first, to collect things, and then for Devonshire and the sunshine."

One quick glance passed between the two who had suffered so much.

" We'll go," said Moira. " Come on, Mr. Sinclair. Whatever happiness lies before us is due to you."

Sinclair stood on the pavement and took the hands of each in turn. He took Moira's hand and gently kissed it. " God send you happiness at last," he said in a shaky voice.

" Aren't you coming with us ? " said Madeline.

" No, I am going back to London alone. My work is done. Good luck to you all."

He stood, a solitary figure, on the pavement as the car swung off, then made his way slowly to the railway station.

THE END